

The Wiles of the Devil

Neil Girrard

Paul instructed,

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes (Greek *methodeia* [3180]).” (Eph. 6:11)

He also wrote,

“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 (Greek *methodeia* [3180]).” (Eph. 4:14)

From these two usages (the only two occurrences in the New Testament), we find that the people of Christ are opposed by both evil men and evil spiritual beings (the devil and the demonic) who use *methodeia* as their primary weapon. It is of primary importance to any soldier who would like to survive the day’s battle to know what weapons his enemy is using and how to counter those weapons.

Paul wrote. “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:3-6) As we might expect, since we serve the King of truth (Jn. 18:37, etc.) and we are opposed by the devil (who is a liar and murderer from the beginning – Jn. 8:44), we need to learn to wield truth. Though love is a slightly more important weapon for the genuine follower of Christ (Eph. 4:15, etc.), truth is still a vitally important aspect of our spiritual warfare. (2 Tim. 2:15, etc.) And since the devil and his hordes are more effective at their warfare than most give them credit, he knows what weapons we are supposed to be wielding and he has concocted powerful schemes to separate us from those weapons, which if we but knew how to use them, would debilitate his kingdom of shadows, deceptions and darkness in short order.

Schemes Defined

This Greek word, *methodeia*, is a very interesting word. Further, because these are the only two times it is used, it holds much more significance than one might at first suppose.

Methodeia is translated variously as “wiles” or “schemes” or, as in the Latin Vulgate Bible, “insidious.”

- *Wiles* refer to “devious or cunning stratagems employed in manipulating or persuading someone to do what one wants; lure, entice.”
- *Schemes* are defined as “large-scale systematic plans or arrangements for attaining some particular object or putting a particular idea into effect; to make plans, especially in a devious way or with intent to do something illegal or wrong.”
- *Insidious* refers to “proceeding in a gradual, subtle way, but with harmful effects; treacherous, crafty.”

These English renderings alone should begin to get our attention. But consider a more complete explanation of the Greek word:

- This word has not been found in writings prior to the New Testament. There is no previous usage of this word to give us further insight into how this word came into usage or why Paul chose this word as the description of the key element of the forces that oppose us. But there are two very closely related words (*methodos* and *methodeuo*) that have been found in several places and they refer to “the premeditation and art expressed in method, especially, in a bad sense,” either through the use of military cunning or as in the more neutral sense of collecting taxes. As these words developed historically, they first had the sense “to treat methodically,” “to handle according to plan.” This sense of methodically collecting taxes or debts is found in their earlier uses but they subsequently took on the nuance of “handling craftily,” “overreaching,” and “deceiving.”

- In Paul’s discussion of the armor of the believer, the word refers to machinations or military attacks against which one must be armed in order to defend oneself. The multi-faceted nature of these attacks – and they are plural, suggesting that they are made repeatedly or are of such varying types that they resist being catalogued – is what makes the attacks so deadly. That is, it is their multiple variety that constitutes their great danger and only the armor of God – the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ in various aspects – is the only possible and effective defense.

- Some Greek scholars believe that these attacks are defined not by their superior technique or brilliant strategy but rather by their constant refinement and persistent insidiousness. That is, it is not that the devil has to keep coming up with new and brilliant schemes but rather all he has to do is tweek the old ones a little bit, refining this detail for one generation, changing one aspect for one culture, another for another, keep the deception but change the labels (e.g., change “elder” to “bishop,” “bishop” to “pastor,” “personal pastor” to “spiritual father,” etc.) as is needed and just keep these refinements coming with steady repetition. And this is precisely how he works against us. There are no particularly new schemes formed against the people of Christ – only old ones (some of which come from the dawn of Catholicism but which are still working with great effectiveness) that are precisely and tailor fit for each culture, generation, group and even individual.

We can conclude from all this that this is not a “methodical confusion of truth,” but rather a cunning process which draws men functionally and in practice into the grip and power of deception. In modern vernacular, we would call this the con-game, that sophisticated use of deception and illusion to win the confidence of the victim (the deceived) and get them to voluntarily place themselves under the power and disposal of the con-man (the deceiver) and do whatever his purpose is.

This is precisely Paul’s warning to Timothy regarding how servants of the Lord should respond to those in opposition to the truth. “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Specific Schemes

Though it is, as this Greek word *methodeia* implies, impossible to catalogue all the various deceptions that are used against us, let us examine four of the most effective of the large scale deceptions the devil has insidiously refined during the two millennia of church history.

Scheme 1

The most effective stratagem in use against the people of Christ today is the one men most often call “church.” As is true of most effective con-games, truth is incorporated alongside error in order to deceive and divert as many as possible from the way of truth and life. Perhaps the easiest way to begin to wrap one’s mind around this scheme is to recognize the linguistic error involved.

- “Church” (the English word as can be found in any worthwhile dictionary) refers to the “Christian” 1) building, 2) clergy, 3) religion and 4) people. When we compare these meanings to the New Testament, we find that 1) “The Most High God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands” (Acts 7:48) so the “church” building is *not* His house; 2) there is no exalted clergy class whatsoever excepted to be forbidden (1 Pet. 5:3) yet the clergy derives their name from the Greek word used in this very verse that originally described *all* the people (and not a select, exalted few “leaders”) as God’s heritage or portion (see *kleros* [2819]); 3) “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (Jas. 1:27) More money is spent on “church” buildings and clergy salaries than on all outreach, charity and missions combined and showing how much like the world we can be and still be a “Christian” is a very acceptable norm at many, if not most “churches.”

- The word “church” has historically been used to translate the Greek word *ekklesia*. [1577] This word *ekklesia* is a political word that refers to the political assembly that gathered to attend to the affairs and issues of their particular locale. The Christians appropriated the word (just as they had with other words such as *agape* [26] which now refers to God’s unique and transcendent love for mankind) and thus *ekklesia* refers to the *people* who have been translated from darkness to light and are now to gather to attend to the affairs and issues of Christ’s kingdom as they need addressed in their particular locale. Thus *people* – the *fourth* definition of “church” – is the *only* sense in which the word “church” has any relationship with *ekklesia*. Three parts deception, one part truth – tells the story very nicely.

If that doesn’t suffice to bring enlightenment, consider that Jesus never once used the word “church” (it’s an English word – English wouldn’t come into existence for over a 1,000 years!) and further, He most likely didn’t even use the Greek word *ekklesia*. (Having been sent only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” – Mt. 15:24 – Greek studies are not likely to have been high on His list!) Thus we can observe that Christ proclaimed the kingdom of God but it was the *ekklesia* and then the “church” that took the preeminence. Matthew alone puts the word *ekklesia* into Jesus’ teachings (3 times in 2 verses – Mt. 16:18, 18:17) and on that scant basis some scholars have even tried to get us to believe that “church” is therefore a major theme in Matthew’s gospel! Three usages do not a major theme make! In 1611, perhaps in response to King James’ arbitrary edict to retain “certain of the old words: viz a viz, church,” his translators put “church” in one place where “temple” obviously belongs (Acts 19:37) and three times used “assembly” to translate *ekklesia* more accurately. (Acts 19:32, 39, 41) displaying, for those who could see it, the confusion the King’s edict would cause. It is simply undeniable that deception abounds in the treatment of this word *ekklesia* and it can also be observed that ecclesiology (the study of the governing and organizing of Christ’s people) suffers perhaps the most (in comparison to the other categories of Scriptural insight – soteriology, eschatology, etc.) from deceptive linguistic subterfuge and confusion.

Scheme 2

Fitting like a hand and glove with the “church” paradigm deception is the second effective stratagem used against us – that of the “pastor” behind a pulpit upon a platform as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the “church.” Let us examine this deception with the most easily demonstrable item first.

- The pulpit cannot be found anywhere in the New Testament – neither can the platform. They simply don’t exist there. But they are center stage (literally!) in almost every “church” around the world. The pulpit is the centerpiece of all furniture in the “Christian” religion yet it cannot be found anywhere in the pages of the New Testament. This alone should cause those who truly want to follow Christ and God to hesitate to participate in its usage – but when one discovers where it does truly come from, genuine followers of Christ should want to burn it! The pulpit and platform were imported directly from the pagan temples of the 2nd and 3rd centuries into the “Christian” temples that were funded by Constantine. The pulpit was called the “ambo” and the platform demonstrated the exalted qualities of the pontiffs (“bridges” – note well how the Catholic sect imported this title as well for its clergy) between the people and the gods. Yet the New Testament tells us that there is only *one* mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5) This discrepancy is routinely overlooked or ignored.

- Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them are given the title Benefactor. But you are not to be like that.” (Lk. 22:25-26) Any person who holds any position that they think gives them the right to exercise authority over other believers is deceived. If the “pastor” holds the power of a CEO, he or she is deceived, a victim of this second of Satan’s schemes against the people of Christ.

- The Greek word poorly translated “pastor” is *poimen* [4166] and it really means “shepherd.” It is used 18 times in the New Testament and only 1 time is it ever rendered “pastor” – and even then the word is plural! There simply is no evidence in the New Testament of there being a single “pastor” over any assembly and there is certainly no place for “pastors” being in some sort of chain of command over other believers.. The evidence shows that it was only in the ante-nicene era (the years directly after the original apostles passed from the scene) that “bishops” began practicing and teaching what church history calls “the ascendancy of the bishopric,” that is, the “bishop” standing over the people as the lord or president of an assembly. Paul prophesied to the Ephesian elders, “From your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:30) This is precisely what happened. From the ranks of the elders “bishops” rose up and distorted the truth so as to keep those who followed after then “safe” in “the truth” (as they saw and taught it – which too often was neither truth nor even scriptural!) The people of Christ have yet to recover from succumbing to this deception.

Scheme 3

The third effective deceptive scheme set in opposition against us is one Paul said was already at work in his day – the mystery of lawlessness. (2 Ths. 2:7) If all we have is an intellectual’s understanding of this word, we will come up short. A mystery must be revealed by God or it will not be rightly understood. Lawlessness (Greek *anomia* [458]) is literally “no law” or “without law.” Since we

have been delivered from the clutches of the law (Col. 2:15, etc.) why is being “without law” such a sin that we would be eternally dismissed by Christ? (see Mt. 7:23) Lawlessness is best described as “doing what is right in one’s own eyes.” This was the condition of the Israelites who had no king (Jdgs. 21:25) and it is the condition of many “Christians” today who do not literally and actively submit to Christ as King and Lord but instead use His name as some kind of feel-good crutch to prop up their self-focused lives as they continue to do whatever seems good to them according to their own tastes and preferences. This is how they choose which “church” to attend, which “theology” to embrace, which “man of God” to submit to and support, etc. But this is merely and only lawlessness, doing what is right in one’s own eyes. Paul wrote that lawlessness, what is right in one’s own eyes, has nothing in common with righteousness, what is right in God’s eyes (2 Cor. 6:14) This mindset of doing what is right in one’s own eyes (called relativism in secular philosophy) is one of the chief methods by which a believer is lured away from diligent obedience to Christ and God and into self- or demonic-directed activities. Jesus said that in the days before His return, “lawlessness will abound and the love of many will be cold.” (Mt. 24:12)

Scheme 4

The fourth stratagem is that which we were warned of by Peter. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” (2 Pet. 2:1) Most often we think that “destructive heresies” here is referring to “error,” blatantly false teachings that stand in stark contrast to the standard, basic teachings of the New Testament. This false understanding is aided along nicely by the KJV’s rendering as “*damnable heresies*.” But this is simply not so.

The Greek word here is “haireisis” [139] and it has several meanings. It can refer to “the act of taking or capturing,” as in storming a city. It can refer to “choosing, choice or that which is chosen.” It can refer to “a body of men following their own tenets”(sect or party like the Sadducees, Pharisees and even Christians). Or it can refer to “dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.” It is a direct opposite to the concept of the body of Christ which is based in unity and oneness. “Hairesis” is dividedness and multiplicity.

Peter is not referring to error, but divisions – various groups of “Christians” (some even possessing genuine faith in Christ Jesus) each separating off into its own little place and refusing to have much, if anything, to do with other groups who claim to have Christ but who also have a different understanding on some doctrine, tenet, practice or feature of “Christianity.” Today, we call that denominationalism – and it is the accepted order of following Christ.

When Peter says these divisions were secretly introduced, it is meant in much the same way as what Jesus said about how the tares were planted – men slept. (Mt. 13:25) And when Peter says that these divisions deny the Lord who bought them, he has, in a prophetically “cryptic” way, told us that those who are in these divisions do not practice submission to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. (see *despotes* [1203]) The “church” with its many denominations merely give Him lip service but do not produce many true saints who do the work of the kingdom of God.

Churchianity *is* the great falling away from the faith. The systematic dividing of the people of Christ into various groups is no accident – it is a scheme of the enemy to keep us from being unified. When we are unified, the world will know that we are believers in Christ and it will clearly demonstrate – even to the world – that Christ came from God. (Jn. 17:21, 23) Is it any wonder Satan would strive mightily to concoct a grand strategy to secretly bring in division among the people who name the name of Christ? And what does it say about the vast majority of people who claim to follow Christ but see nothing wrong with practicing denominational division in His name? Only that the prophecies about the *great* falling away are being fulfilled before our very eyes and that the vast majority of “Christians” are just like the Jews of Jesus’ day who had eyes but did not see and ears but did not hear.

A Dangerous Foe

We face a dangerous enemy, not because he is stronger than us – that is, he is not stronger than Christ and, in Christ, we have His strength – but because he is more effectively waging his warfare than we are. In many “church” circles, if he is even acknowledged at all, he is merely a toothless old tiger or a harmless old buffoon who couldn’t hurt anyone even if he wanted to. This is a myth. Satan is defeated, yes, but he has not yet surrendered. In the United States’ Civil War (1861-1865), Robert E. Lee’s army was beaten at Gettysburg and Lee could no longer take the offensive but the war was fought on for two more long years and many thousands of casualties were inflicted on both sides. It was not until Lee surrendered at Appomattox that the war truly ended and even then there were other units who tried to continue the fight for a short time. The devil has been surely and utterly defeated but he will not surrender or stop deceiving until he is captured and forcibly removed. Even then, the New Testament says he will be allowed to return and deceive many again. (Rev. 20:2-3) No, the devil is not going to give up easily and this is the primary reason we must remain vigilant and wary against his dangerous and lethal schemes. (1 Pet. 5:8)

We come under the power of the devil and the demonic only when we voluntarily do so. That is, only when we begin to believe and cooperate with his schemes does he gain any influence or power over us. This is the nature of *methodeia*, the con-game. But in our day and age, the con-game is so pervasive and so widely accepted as the “Christian” norm that many people begin their “Christian” life by submitting to one form of deception or another all while believing themselves to be in the right way of following Christ and God! And many “Christian” leaders continually reassure them that Satan is just a harmless, toothless old tiger even as he owns them!

Christ is our only defensive “weapon” and He is our only offensive “weapon.” The letter to the Ephesians can be seen as Paul’s letter specifically written to the end-time generation to help them overcome the effects of the apostasy, the falling away from the faith that comes before the return of Christ (2 Ths. 2:3) – the letter’s form, structure and content provide the clearest, highest presentation of the mature life in Christ and it resonates with Paul’s passion to preserve the souls of those he loved and disciplined. (And there are other clues throughout the New Testament too numerous and detailed to explain here but consider that Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had “not shunned to declare to [them] the whole counsel of God.” – Acts 20:27 – and his later letter to them may well be a concise representation of this “whole counsel of God”!) Paul’s unique usage of *methodeia* adds to this overall thrust by being the chief place where he exposes the devil’s primary deceitful strategies. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we can see how the schemes are layered together and have been insidiously refined over the centuries and how they lure and entice believers away from the road that leads to life even as the very words of Christ and God are spoken (but not obeyed).

Overcoming the Schemes of Men

When Paul warns of the deceitful scheming of evil men, he begins the sentence by saying, “*Then* we will no longer be infants...” (Eph. 4:14) When will we be mature enough to no longer be ensnared by the scheming of evil men who try to deceive and entice us away from pure truth? We must follow Paul’s train of thought on this one as it is closely related to what he has said previously in this chapter.

Paul first lists the “ones” of our life in God: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above and through all, and in us all. (Eph. 4:4-6) From this oneness springs the manifold grace which Paul describes by saying, “But [from this One-ness] to each one of us grace was given according to the measure by which Christ gives it.” (Eph. 4:7) Paul goes on to say that Christ gave some people to be expressions of His grace – listing here apostles, prophets, heralds, shepherds and teachers and using other labels in the lists in his other writings. (Do not mistake those who have only transliterated and usurped the mere label and created some deceptive *position* as if they were those who genuinely operate in the grace – power – of God in these *functions*!) These people,

as they express the grace of Christ to those around them, equip the saints to do the work of service to Christ, His body and even the world (Eph. 4:11-12), empowering them (by means of their personally partaking of the grace of Christ and God through the work of these people) to attend to the orphans and widows and the least of Christ's brothers (Jas. 1:27, Mt. 25:40, 45) and to love one another as He commanded. (Jn. 13:34-35) When these people, expressing the grace (mercy *and* power) that comes from their oneness with Christ and God, fulfill this work, then – ***and only then!*** – will we see the unanimity of the faith, the unanimity of our knowledge of the Son of God, true spiritual maturity and a tangible and visible similarity and resemblance between our lives and that of Christ Jesus. “*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.” (Eph. 4:14) When we have learned to follow after and imitate those whom God has truly graced and gifted and we have rejected those who merely scratch and tickle ears (2 Tim. 4:3-4) and when we are no longer drawn off into the various sects of churchianity but instead remain faithful to Him who has bought us with His own blood, *then* we will become mature enough to recognize and discard the evil schemings of evil men.

Overcoming the Schemes of the Devil

When Paul wrote that we would need to “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Eph. 6:11), he then went on to list out what this full armor is. Paul wrote:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Eph. 6:13-18)

This is an expansion of what Paul taught elsewhere when he wrote, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Rom. 13:14) He also wrote, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want... The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that flesh nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” (Gal. 5:17, 6:8) This *is* the nature of the war into which we have been plunged.

The follower of Christ has three enemies: the flesh, the world and the devil. We *first* need to individually and personally experience Christ's victory over the flesh before we can even really think of overcoming the schemes of the devil and the demonic that have been discussed here. To take this first step, however, we need to know what the flesh is and how to overcome it. The flesh is the sinful nature, the capacity to do evil, to be selfish, to disobey God. It is an inherited trait we acquired from Adam's rebellion against God.

Paul wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” (Rom. 7:18) This is knowledge which modern man has lost and cannot attain. It is a spiritual insight that in our flesh nothing truly good dwells – that God alone is good (Mt. 19:17) and from Him alone come all good things (Jas. 1:17) – and this spiritual knowledge is simply not available to the natural man. (1 Cor. 2:14) That so many self-proclaimed “Christians” still believe themselves to be “good people” is only conclusive evidence and

proof that they are still living according to the flesh. Were they truly spiritual people, they would know that there is nothing good in them, that there was nothing in Judas Iscariot that is not within them as well. Then they might literally and actually and actively turn to Christ and God and be progressively healed and cleansed of all unrighteousness.

Paul also wrote, “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” (Rom. 8:12-13) Herein is the secret of Satan’s strategy against the individual – to cleverly manipulate or deceive the individual into neglecting his obligation to the Spirit of God and, instead, into living according to the sinful nature so that he will remain in or return to the ways of the flesh. The institutionalized “Christian religion” has become one of the best producers of lost souls that Satan has ever concocted as self-proclaimed “Christians” do little more than attend the religious social-club that suits their tastes and status in life and try to be somewhat better moral people in whatever aspect of their life they see themselves as deficient. As we have already seen, the New Testament calls this lawlessness, doing what is right in one’s own eyes, and clearly tells us that it is in direct opposition to righteousness, what is right in *God’s* eyes. (2 Cor. 6:14)

Paul also said, “So then those who are living the life of the flesh [catering to the appetites and impulses of their carnal nature] cannot please or satisfy God or be acceptable to Him.” (Rom. 8:8) If Satan can deceive us into living according to the flesh – even if that is in religious ways – causing us to neglect to put to death the misdeeds of the body but rather to practice them as if they were acceptable religion in the sight of God, we will die the second death. Do not be deceived on this matter by any popular teacher who knows how to scratch your ears in such a way that you find yourself craving more scraps from his pulpit (2 Tim. 4:3-4) nor fall for the enticing but empty, boastful words that appeal to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, promising liberty but actually bringing the listener back under bondage to corruption and death. (2 Pet. 2:18-19)

Until we truly overcome our flesh, there really is no fighting the world or the devil because we are already their victim, their slave, perhaps even a willing supporter or avid perpetuator of demonic “church” schemes.

In the Revelation, John is told, “They overcame [the devil, the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” (Rev. 12:11) The true way of following Christ still requires that we take up our cross and follow Him unto death (Lk. 9:23, etc.) – anything else is just Satan’s *methodeia* of luring us away from the road that leads to life. Only those who, by virtue of their diligent maintenance of their union with Christ, are self-controlled, alert and vigilant (1 Pet. 5:8) will be able to see to it that no one deceives them. (Mt. 24:4) “But know this, that in the last days *perilous* times will come...” (2 Tim. 3:1)

Let he who has ears hear.

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