

- **\*READ John 8:42-47\*** There are many issues and subjects that are widely misunderstood in the Bible, but one of the subjects that I believe is most misunderstood is that of Satan. In fact, me simply referring to him as if his name is Satan is understood by Hebrew scholars to be a misunderstanding. In Hebrew, this title, not name, of Satan is always preceded by "the" meaning that he is referred to as The Satan which simply means The Adversary.
- This might be a new realization to many of you as it was to myself when first doing some study on spiritual beings, but I'm sure we have all heard many other hypothesis or beliefs about The Satan that simply aren't substantiated in Scripture. A couple of examples might be the misconception that The Satan is as powerful as God and can do anything he wants regardless of what God might command him to do. That simply isn't substantiated when we look in the book of Job. God has to allow the Satan to inflict harm upon Job and even puts limits on what he can do to Job. (**Job 1:13**) We're probably also well aware of the caricature of the Satan as a little red man with horns, a pointy tail, and a pitch fork, but the only true description we have of the Satan in bodily form is when he comes to Eve in the Garden and he is described as a serpent which is the same Hebrew word us to describe the seraphim in **Isaiah 6** which were known as flying fiery serpent type creatures.
- Nevertheless, I believe we get the point of the Satan being a pretty universally misunderstood subject in the Bible. However, let me suggest that while there are many misunderstandings, there ought to be some things about the Satan that ought to be firmly cemented within our minds. Those thoughts that we must be certain of center around the fact that he is our adversary, and one of the most important rules of warfare is that we must know our enemy. While Jesus isn't exactly stating what He states in **John 8** as a lesson to help the people know their enemy better...we are taught a number of things about our evil enemy.
- We are first told that the devil, as Jesus refers to him, was a murderer from the beginning, and we'll talk more about that in just a moment. But suffice to say at this moment that he is up to evil things. We also read that he does not stand for the truth because there is no truth in him. In fact, Jesus goes so far to say that when he tells a lie, he is speaking from his very nature. He is a liar, that is just who he is to his very core. I think we're sensing a theme for the true character of the devil our adversary, and Jesus rightly gives him another title as *"The father of lies."*
- Lest we just skim over these verses and not recognize the seriousness of this being our enemy's nature, I want for us to take some time to dig deeper into this core portion of his character. We are living in times where I am convinced that demonic forces are heavily at work in many ways. This isn't to say that I believe crazy super nature happenings are occurring like demon possession or the like, but I am saying that the deception influences of the evil one and his demonic forces are at play, and we need to give effort to be able to recognize his deception influences and know how to respond to them in our own lives. Let's begin as we seem to do so often...in the beginning to look deeper into Jesus's words of the devil being a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies.

### Recognizing the *Deceptive Influences* of our *Adversary*

- I. **From the beginning, the evil one has been hard at work seeking to deceive mankind to our detriment.**
  - A. If you have heard me speak for any length of time, then you know just how key I believe the events of **Genesis 1-3** are to the entire Bible story. We are told in **Genesis 1 & 2** of the wonderful dwelling place God created that is own as the Garden of Eden. It was the perfect intersection between the divine and the created. God and man walked together in bliss and harmony. Man was given rule over everything in the Garden and commissioned to carry out the important tasks of reproduction (**1:28**) and tending to the Garden (**2:15**). The one prohibition is that he was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (**2:17**)
  - B. The environment in the garden seems to have been exactly as God designed for it to be as His creation dwelt in harmony with the man and the woman ruling as His representatives. However, there was one being that sought to and succeeded in throwing a wrench into God's wonderful design and purposes. He is described in **Genesis 3:1** as the serpent who was the most cunning of all of the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He comes to Eve and asks a simple question, *"Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?"* Did you catch the way that question is asked? *"Did God \*really\* tell you*

that you can't eat from any tree of the garden?" The question is posed in such a way that mixes truth with misrepresentation. Yes, God did tell them some things concerning trees that they could and could not eat of, but he also poses the question as if it is unreasonable on God's part. "Did God **really** say \_\_\_\_\_?"

- C. To Eve's credit, she does not initially fall for this misrepresentation or allow it to cause her to question the command of God. In fact, she turns right around and tells the serpent what God has said and even adds on a extra layer of protection that might have been implemented by her husband or herself. "**We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'**" (**Genesis 3:2,3**) This response provides the serpent with an opportunity to flat out deny what God has spoken to the man and his wife, "**No! You will certainly not die**" ("doomed to die", Alter), "**the serpent said to the woman. 'In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'**" (**Genesis 3:4,5**)
- D. I want us to notice that the serpent, again, phrases this statement in such a deceiving way! He first flat out defies what God has said and contradicts it by saying that they would not die. It could be that he is speaking to the immediate consequence for their actions which could be true since they were not immediately struck dead. However, he is deceptive in the fact that their actions would eventually lead to their deaths. (**Genesis 5:5**) The text seems to indicate that they could have lived forever while in the Garden and with access to the tree of life, but their sin would make that something that simply couldn't happen. (**Genesis 3:22**)
- E. Finally, I want to notice that the serpent takes a truth and twists it to make it seem as if it is not true. He tempts them by saying "**you will be like God**", but the reality is that they already were like God! They were made in His image to bear and reflect His attributes. Yet, the way the serpent frames the question...he makes it seem as if there was still something left to be desired. Friends, I want us to be fully aware that we continue to go up against a cunning adversary. He is well skilled and capable in the art of deception and manipulation of truth, and yet that leads us to question why it is that he seeks to operate in this manner. Why does he deceive?

## II. He seeks to deceive and spread deception because it leads to distrust and chaos among men.

- A. We could answer this question from our opening text by speaking to the fact that this is simply his nature as the evil one and adversary who has rebelled against God. Such a rebellion (though we are not given much in the way of detail...maybe the rebellion was the temptation of the Garden with the casting down being alluded to in the serpent being condemned to crawl on his belly, **Genesis 3:14**) is believed by some to be spoken of in **Isaiah 14** & **Ezekiel 28** depending on how you understand the language and meaning behind what these prophets are saying.
- B. Whether or not these are writings alluding to the evil one, I am confident we can gather from simply what we see in the Garden that the evil one greatly desires for their to be ever present conflict and chaos in this world. He was able to create conflict between God and man through temptation and the sin of Adam and Eve. We then see in the next chapter that sin is crouching at the door of Cain's heart in regards to his anger over the sacrifices that had been offered to God. (**Genesis 4:6,7**) I have little doubt that the evil one's influence was there in that moment and from then on.
- C. These thoughts coupled with what we read in **James 4:1-4** seems to clearly leave me with the understanding that the evil one desires, loves, and thrives on chaos among mankind and between them and their God. If he is behind the temptations that we face in this life and those temptations lead to sin (**James 1:13-15**) which causes a separation between us and our God (**Isaiah 59:2**), then we must understand that when this takes place...we are giving the evil one exactly what he wants! He wants for us to be wrapped up in chaos and contact upheaval.
- D. How does he accomplish such thing? He does so through influencing people to deceive, manipulate, and flat out lie. If you don't believe that much is true...then I invite you to simply observe the current climate in which we live concerning COVID-19. One of the most frustrating parts of this whole ordeal is that there doesn't seem to hardly be anyone out there who is willing to honestly report on what is taking place. Whether you're talking about right leaning or left leaning news outlets or reporters...someone almost

always seems to have an agenda and is willing to twist these stats or this report in order to lead the viewer to certain conclusions that will bolster the position(s) of this reporter or that network. What does all of this lead to? Only worsening the divides that currently exist among people in our society.

- E. Friends, I'm going to be straight up with you and tell you that all of this that is taking place is of the devil. It is evil and demonic in nature, and it is only the latest situation that plays perfectly into what Paul writes to the Ephesians in **Ephesians 6:10-12**, *"Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens."* While the chaos might not be centered around religious issues...we must admit that these issues are having a strong impact on God's people even to the extent that the evil one's deception influences are being seen among us.

### III. His deceptive influences have even be seen and evident among God's people.

- A. The reality is that it shouldn't surprise us when we see people of the world getting into heated arguments over various facets of the COVID-19 crisis. Those who live under the power of the ruler of this world (**I John 5:19**) are behaving just like their master when they argue and fuss in such a way that only further chaos is created. However, we as Christians have been called out of this dark world and out from under the power and dominion of the evil one into the marvelous light of God. (**I Peter 2:9**), and we must be sure that this truth is being born out in the way that we live.
- B. Lest we think that is a given...let's direct our minds to a couple of examples in Scripture where the evil one's wicked influence has been clearly seen in Christians. In **Acts 5:1-11**, a Christian husband named Ananias and his wife Sapphira desired to deceive their way into a good name and reputation by lying concerning just how much of the money gained from the selling of property was being given to the church. They claimed all of it was going to the church, but his simply was not the truth. Yes, they had sold land for a price, but they tried to deceived the Apostles into thinking it was only for that certain amount they were giving. (**Acts 5:7-9**)
- C. While this deception might have slipped by the Apostles, it did not slip past the Spirit for He calls them out and Peter sharply rebukes Ananias, *"why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God."* (**Acts 5:3,4**) Do you notice where Peter roots their evil behavior? He roots it in the influence of the Satan in their hearts. He had influenced them to try to make a larger gain on their good deed, but such actions only led to chaos and death...exactly what we see in the beginning.
- D. The same type of demonic influence can be found in **I Timothy 4:1-5** as Paul warns Timothy of a time coming down the road when *"some will depart from the faith, paying attention to **deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer.**"* Some take this text to be speaking to the rise of teachings within the Catholic church, but I'm not so sure that is exactly the case since Paul is warning Timothy to be on the lookout for such things and Timothy would be long gone by the time the Catholic Church rises to power. Regardless, the truth remains that Paul recognizes, through the Spirit, that difficulties were coming and that they were going to be coming upon the people of God because of the influences of deceitful spirits and demons. So what does this mean for us as Christians and how we respond to the obvious deceptive influences of Satan in this life?

### IV. CONCLUSIONS: We must be aware of his influence and seek to combat it by being totally committed to truth.

- A. It is of the utmost importance that we do not allow the wool to be pulled over our eyes concerning what is going on in this world all around us. We might be tempted to disconnect spiritual things from the usual happenings of this world, but we must keep our whits about us recognize who is truly behind all of this. I am constantly thinking upon **I Peter 5:6-9** when it comes to the instability of this life that is a result of

constant strive, upheaval, and chaos. This text not only encourages us through calls for humility and cast care upon God, but it also admonishes us to remember that it is our adversary who is behind the difficulties that we face. Yet, we will only recognize that when we take off our secular lenses and have a truly spiritual worldview that takes everything into consideration.

- B. What I mean by that is that we must recognize that the struggles we see with our eyes find their roots beyond this world. Again, consider **Ephesians 6:10-12**, *“Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.”* Paul makes it abundantly clear that though we are struggling in this flesh, the true source of the struggle is not flesh and blood but it is of supernatural origins. All of these struggles originate from the evil influences of our adversary and his evil spiritual forces. I’m not trying to be mystical and say that this is the devil using people as puppets or anything of that nature, but I am saying that the evil that exist is all of his doing. He has made this world what it is, and the struggles we see are all his handiwork.
- C. What then are we to do? Thankfully, the text informs us of this, as well. We are to go to war against these wicked spiritual forces by ourselves be spiritual armed. We are to stand up and resist by the power that God graciously supplies to us, and it is no surprise to me at all that the very first thing we are told to take up is *“truth like a belt around your waist.”* Brothers and sisters...that is no coincidence! The foundational tool we must use to defeat the evil one is to stand firmly upon the truth and then we must also rely upon righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and God’s Word.
- D. Let’s direct our focus, though, on that idea of having truth as if it is a belt upon us. Belts are so important and I’m sure we have all seen the disastrous results of belts not be used or used properly. I can remember a poor young man at a marketing band competition I was at in support of Katie while she was in high school. He was playing the tuba, and bless his heart his belt failed him and those pants came down right in the middle of his band’s performance. A belt helps the whole outfit together, and the same is true of truth. If we are not committed to seeking and holding onto the pure truth then we will only find ourselves struggling with not sure way of resolution. Our hold to truth must be without bias or manipulation of truth, and we ought not give attention to those who seek to weaponize truth for their own gain.
- E. Now, this isn’t to say that truth will also bring people together into perfect harmony and with no problems. As good Bible students, we know that isn’t the case! Our Lord even said in His ministry that He did not come to bring peace but a sword. He came to turn people against one another. **(Matthew 10:32-36)** This is a shocking statement and it is what we have been speaking against this morning, but when we realize that He is speaking of the affect that His bringing of truth will have then it all makes sense. The reality is that the truth is a dividing force in and of itself. Its separates the willing believers from the deniers. It separates those who simply want to shoot straight from those who have an agenda. It separates the faithful from the unfaithful and the righteous from the unrighteous. The pure and simply truth is the rock that we can and ought to stand firmly upon when the world all around us is drowning in the sinking sands of truth. It is something that is outside of ourselves and objective in reality. This is what Jesus came to bring, and we as His followers must hold onto truth, without bias or agenda, at all cost if we want to be a positive influence on this world and be at peace apart from the chaos that is present all around us.

Real quick, let’s go back to **John 8**. We began with this text and noted that Jesus is identify the evil one as having these various negative attributes, but do you notice why this was even brought up? It was brought up because these Jews were making a claim to be a part of God’s people through Abraham while being fully under the bondage of the devil who Jesus says is truly their father. Friends, let’s recognize that there are so many who continue to be in bondage today through the deceptive influences of the evil one, but the good news is that we can find freedom in Christ and in His truth. If we are weary from the mess of this chaotic world, then let me invite you to open your eyes to see the demonic influences all around us, to choose instead to think upon Jesus, and to allow His truths to bring you freedom and peace. *“As He was saying these things, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.””* (John 8:30-32)