

The Devil's Two Goals

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We have a tendency to blame the devil for everything from unemployment to accidents to wars, and maybe even pandemics. But the Bible indicates that the devil is really working on only two goals to achieve one overall plan. These two goals are the arms of a pincer movement to achieve his objective. Don't worry. The devil doesn't have a chance in hell of succeeding. Jesus has already defeated him (John 12:31; 16:11; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). But, like a snake that continues to whip around after its head is cut off, he's still trying; and he can cause problems for those who aren't aware of his tactics. So, it can help us to know what the devil's two goals are so that we can recognize them and not become discouraged. Let's take a look.

The Devil's First Goal: To Keep People from Finding the Gospel

The devil tries to keep people from finding the Gospel through counterfeiting and disinformation, confusion, and distraction.

Counterfeiting and disinformation: The devil causes false preachers to preach appealing, false gospels. Paul warns, "But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). He wrote to the Galatians,

I marvel that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different "good news"; and there isn't another "good news." Only there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the Good News of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any "good news" other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed.

Galatians 1:6-8

Pulpits, books, radio, television, and the internet are defiled by the siren songs of false gospels: prosperity, grace plus works, moralism, sanctification by law-keeping, social justice, nationalism, New Age spirituality, conditional grace, Lordship salvation, and Dominionism are just a few. Satan, the devil, is the author of this disinformation or fake news. He has designed these counterfeit gospels to fool people and keep them from finding the true Gospel of Jesus' death on the Cross through which He has redeemed to God all who believe on Him.

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Confusion: The devil causes people who claim to be Christians to behave in unloving ways that cause people to stumble. Instead of being lights illuminating the Gospel and living as examples of God's liberating love, Christians have become known for pointing out sin and trying to enact and enforce laws against it. Those who claim the name of Christian campaign for politicians, march for or against gun ownership, protest quarantine restrictions, and expend their energies in myriad political causes, seemingly forgetting that God has already "delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Preachers confuse those looking for the Gospel by associating their message with a particular brand of politics. All of this is confusion that plays right into the hands of the devil.

Distraction: When churches put so much of their effort and message into politics, economics, prosperity, emotional well-being, entertaining music, and so forth, they distract people from the Gospel. This is of the devil.

These counterfeits and distractions can be stumbling blocks, for a time, even to the elect, and those who are the devil's tools will answer for it:

...certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes!

Matthew 18:3-7

We have a duty to expose false teaching. For example:

Now I beg you, brothers, look out for [*skopeō*—"look at, direct attention to, mark"] those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them. For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their

smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.

Romans 16:17-18

Nevertheless, we have no reason to fear that the devil will succeed in keeping God's elect from salvation. They may stumble for a while, but everyone whom God determined in eternity would be saved, everyone for whom Christ died, will find the Gospel and believe.

All those whom the Father gives me will come to me. He who comes to me I will in no way throw out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day.

John 6:37-39

The Devil's Second Goal: Use Guilt to Discourage Believers

The devil is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). Yet, a hallmark of the Gospel is that Jesus has freed us from the law (Romans 7:4-6; Galatians 5:1), from sin (Romans 6:14, 18), and from guilt and condemnation (John 5:24). The Gospel teaches that it is impossible for a believer to be guilty (Romans 8:1; 1 John 3:9). The devil's way to get around this is through the heresy of legalism, and he has been doing this for centuries.

By deceiving believers into thinking they are still under law, the devil throws them into discouragement. By causing them to look at themselves compared to the law, Satan makes them see sin rather than the righteousness of Christ. This false weight of sin hinders them in their Christian race.

Suggested reading: "What Is Legalism?" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/legalism/>)

The reality, of course, is that since we are free from the law, from sin, and from guilt and condemnation, we are free from the devil's accusations: "We know that whoever is born of God doesn't sin, but he who was born of God keeps himself, and the evil one doesn't touch him" (1 John 5:18). All he can do is confuse us for a time into thinking we are guilty of sin. But we are not guilty and never can be because our righteousness is Jesus' righteousness:

Therefore let us also, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so

easily entangles us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

When God looks upon us, He doesn't see sin. He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The devil likes us to forget what Jesus has with so great a price accomplished for us on the Cross.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1

The Devil's Overall Plan

What then is the devil's overall plan? Why is he trying to hide the Gospel from the elect and discourage the brothers with accusations? To find out, let's look at his history.

In the Garden of Eden, the old serpent deceived Eve with the lie that disobeying God would not lead to death. By doing this, he tempted Eve—and through her, Adam—to sin and brought condemnation upon all humanity. The devil also wanted to get Job to sin (Job 1:11; 2:4-5). The devil even tried to get Jesus to sin (Matthew 4:1-11). The devil got Judas to sin so that he would betray Jesus. The common thread is that the devil is always trying to act contrary to God's plan, although he unwittingly is really part of God's plan.

The devil's design is to overturn the work of Jesus Christ—to defeat the Gospel. It is a hopeless cause, and he is insane to try it. But try it, he does. Let's not worry about the devil. He may go about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But only those who are not covered by the blood of Christ can ever really fall to him. He is, in fact, a measly worm.

We might think that the devil is smart. But because his mind is so corrupt, he has never really understood God's plan. He thought he could thwart God's plan by getting Adam and Eve to sin. But this played right into God's hand because God wanted Jesus to be the Savior. The devil also was God's pawn with Job because God wanted to test Job. He tried to get Jesus to do his bidding in the

wilderness, but, in fact, this revealed Jesus' superiority to Satan. He thought to stop God's plan by using Judas to get Jesus killed, but Jesus' crucifixion was pivotal to God's plan for saving humanity. The devil is in a similar position to Joseph's brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is today, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The devil wants to stop God from saving humanity. To do this, he used the law to accuse people of sin. When Jesus came, Satan didn't fully understand why, but he got Him killed. He now sees that God used this to save His people, so the devil tries to throw a fog over the Gospel with false messages to keep God's elect from finding the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. And when they still find it and believe, the devil tries to turn even believers from their trust in Christ by tempting them to look at themselves in comparison to the law.

The Bible tells us to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7b). We can do this by making sure that we are speaking a clear Gospel message and exposing false gospels. And we must always be sure that we have our eyes fixed upon Jesus Christ and hear only Him: "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.'... Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone" (Matthew 17:5, 8). We have no reason to ever be discouraged.

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth....
Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18b, 20b