

II.

**Man Versus Satan**

*Who Is Satan?*

**G**OD created Satan. He made Satan a superior and splendid creature. We may safely say that Satan has qualities which place him in a supreme position among all God's creatures. Sincere Christians have even called him the rival of the Lord Jesus Christ. And not without reason. Consider how Scripture contrasts him with the Christ, as it were putting them on one level. Satan is the ruler of the hosts of evil, Christ is Head of the armies of the Lord. Scripture pictures for us two spirit kingdoms, each with its leader, and in opposition to each other. For neither among the good angels nor among men is there any leader over against Christ. Only Satan, head of the hosts of evil spirits, has that appalling position of power.

Further, let us remember that Christ has His great authority and power only as "God revealed in the flesh." But Satan, for all his astounding power, is a mere creature! One cannot help wondering what he might have become, had he not rebelled, had he remained in his angelic state! Even now, though fallen away from God through mutiny, he inspires us with awe; to what grandeur might he not have risen if, instead of falling *away* from God, he had fallen down before Him in eternal worship and devotion?

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But such an one, terrible in power and inspired with unquenchable hatred against Jesus Christ and His people, is our adversary.

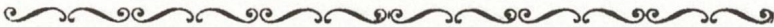
We give too little thought to that power of Satan. We do not realize — not by far do we realize — how great is the power of horrible unholiness which is ever pressing upon us, \* ever ready to attack, bent upon destroying us; nor do we realize how wonderful is the fullness of grace and power that is at work every moment, mercifully shielding our poor souls and the souls of our children against the sinister and fearful foe.

As you grow in realization of the terrifying power of Satan, you will cling the closer to God, call upon Him the more fervently, and thank Him with more ardent love for the deliverance wrought through Jesus Christ, your Saviour.

Satan is well aware of the fact that nothing interferes with his purpose more than man's recognition of him. Therefore he steaks, with his usual cunning and craft, to make men believe that he does not exist. For if there is no Satan, it is toly to be afraid of him. Then, too, since we do not need a protection against an evil being who is mere figment of man's imagination, if there is no Satan we have no need of God and His Christ.

Satan has no difficulty finding helpers who gladly teach and preach such false peace. And then he is in his element, he has free play. When it is considered intelligent and refined to scoff at belief in a Satan, then he reaps his richest harvest of corrupted human hearts, of unhappy opinion and insolently leads even nations astray. Those are tragic days lor mankind.

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But the outlook for the nation, the home, and the individual becomes more hopeful when once again men are keenly aware of Satan's activity, when men once again take him into account in daily life.

For when we realize that Satan is busy and at his tricks, then we are on our guard; then we seek refuge in Him who has crushed Satan's head; then we close our hearts to the stealthy, murderous enemy.

Ponder the situation for a moment. Try to grasp the terrible import. Here is a creature with exceptional talents, with gifts and capacities immeasurably greater than those of any human being. Though fallen, he yet has the nature of an angel and therefore is able to influence men in a manner far beyond our understanding; and he is surrounded by an unnumbered host of other fallen angels who zealously and fanatically aid him in all his hateful efforts to destroy men. Truly, is it not enough to make one tremble? It is a wonder that a child of God, comprehending something of the horrible danger, welcomes the question: What is your only comfort in life and in death? And rejoices in the answer: My only comfort is this that I am not my own but belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, *who has rescued me from all the power of the devil* and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head.

We shall not now discuss further the extent of Satan's power over mankind. In the days of witchcraft that power was no doubt exaggerated, or at least there were false imputations. But it is equally true that in our day his power is greatly underestimated. According to the Word of God, we know that Satan is implicated in suffering such as Job endured, in sorcery, in certain types of insanity, in the deceiv-

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ing of the nations, in temptations of individuals, in acts of violence and enmity against the church of Christ.

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Further investigation of Scripture brings us to another question regarding the power of Satan: Can it be that the coming of Jesus to earth has disarmed Satan? Was Calvary his downfall? Did he there lose the great power which he had in olden times?

Many believe that to be so. For God said to the Satan in Paradise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head/ And the apostle John declares that Christ came "that He might destroy the works of the devil." Therefore, they argue, Satan is through. His power was crushed at Calvary. The roaring lion has been led captive and is now helpless.

But on the basis of God's Word that idea must be declared false. True indeed, we are told that Christ crushed Satan and conquered the might of his kingdom on Calvary—in principle. But the Scriptures just as emphatically declare that Satan will not be thrown into the pool of fire until the end time, and also that he will strive yet more fiercely and bitterly against Christ and His people. Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." The apostles warned their early converts again and again to beware of evil powers of the air, of the prince of the realm of darkness; and throughout the nineteen centuries of the Christian era devout children of God have struggled with the evil one. Think of Luther!

No. Today, this very day, we are by no means free from Satan's activity. We are still subject to his attacks and deceivings; he injects his poisonous profanities even into our very prayers.

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### *Resisting Satan*

Must we be passive when Satan attacks and torments us? Or must we resist him and contend with him? Does the Bible teach us to struggle? Or to Submit humbly to the abuses of Satan?

You may say, "That question is almost blasphemous!"

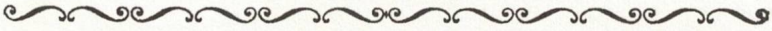
And yet I assure you that there are those for whom the question is not strange, and who answer that we must be passive because Satan's attacks are God's punishment upon us.

On the other hand, for those who believe in the free will of God's creatures, the question has no meaning. They think of Satan as acting wholly on his own, outside of God's control. To them God is not the Supreme One, who has all things in His Hand. They make God dependent, and thus rob Him of His Godhead. Therefore they would not think of asking such a question. They are entirely outside this discussion.

But all who believe in the absolute sovereignty of God confess with us that Satan, too, is a creature; and therefore he, too, is one of God's subjects and can do nothing apart from the will of God. His temptations and attacks are always under God's control. Without the will of our Father in heaven, Satan cannot harm a hair of our head. *All* is under God's domain. Satan has no right over us.

The Lord's prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one," implies clearly that, though God does not tempt us, nevertheless the temptations which come upon us are not outside the sphere of Divine provi-

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dence; and it further implies that God is able to shield His children against the evil one and to keep them safe through the gravest danger.

If then this is our sincere confession, that the temptations of Satan are as much a part of Divine providence as are sickness and trouble and war, then obviously one question holds for all, whether it be pestilence or the enmity of fellow-men or the wiles of Satan that distress us: If God has brought this illness, or this trouble, or this satanic temptation upon me, is it His will that I shall nevertheless resist it? Or ought I to submit to it, humbly drinking the bitter cup to its dregs without protest?


Those who teach passivity in suffering even over against Satan's attacks have reasoned the matter out. They ask "Does not the Bible teach that God has given Satan the liberty to molest us?" And when we answer affirmatively they ask, "And does it not follow, then, that we may not resist? For surely, God lets such troubles come because they must come!" Thus they conclude by their own *reasoning* that resistance to Satan cannot be in accordance with the will of God.

We protest most solemnly against such reasoning. What do we know of God's purposes and intentions? Nothing except what He is pleased to tell us in His Word.

And to this question the Scripture gives clear and decisive answer, in specific pronouncements.

Note the three-fold teaching of the Bible: The *fact* that God does permit Satan to molest us; the *revelation* that nevertheless God wills that we resist Satan; and some *suggestions* which help clear the apparent contradiction. We shall discuss each of these briefly.

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The *fact*, namely that Satan can do nothing against us without or apart from the will of God. This is clearly evident from the story of Job. And it is further clear from the general teaching throughout Scripture that the Lord is God Almighty, Ruler over *all His creatures*.

The *revelation*, namely that we should nevertheless resist Satan and all his evil host with all our might: “Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able *to stand against* the wiles of the devil. For our *wrestling* is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. Wherefore *take up the whole armor of God*, that ye may be able to *withstand* in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:11-13). “*Resist* the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). “. . . Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour; *whom resist . . .*” (I Peter 5:8, 9).

And finally some *suggestions* to clear up the apparent contradiction that God, having loosed Satan to be our adversary, yet requires that we resist him with all our might. In the first place, God lets Satan put us through the fire of trial that our faith may be manifested as valuable gold, pure and genuine, to His glory; think of Job. Secondly, by means of such provocation God reveals unto us our own spiritual weakness. In the third place, our Lord uses Satan as a shepherd uses his dog to drive the sheep to the shepherd. And fourthly, God must triumph over Satan not by hindering his activities, but by first letting him put forth all his might and then overthrowing him with His Divine Supremacy.

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Satan's driving desire is to lay hold upon us and drag us away from Jesus. And because our hearts are so prone to evil, he would most certainly succeed if Jesus did not pray for us. It is a horrible thought—to be sifted by Satan as wheat is sifted! But there is also the wonderfully comforting assurance, "No man can pluck them out of my hand!"

Alongside that assurance from the lips of our precious Saviour stands the command, "Resist the devil!"



III

**Man Versus Nature**

*The Enmity of Nature*

**W**E have concluded that resistance to the onslaughts of Satan is not merely permissible. It is commanded.

We will now take up the next question, a slightly more complicated one: What should our attitude be toward the troubles which come upon us from natural sources—the sicknesses, the suffering, the destruction, the common daily reverses as well as the great and sudden calamities? Should we meekly accept them and surrender to their power over us? Or is it God's will that we resist them in His Name, and defend ourselves against them?

First of all let us once again confess, humbly and devoutly, that "nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father"—a confession which includes the everyday occurrences as well as the extraordinary, a confession which asserts positively and unquestionably that everything is in God's hand and that without His will the powers of nature cannot so much as stir.

God is God. Let us ever *keep* Him God in our thoughts and considerations. All the devotion and all the true piety of our confession is based upon the exalted concept that God is *absolutely* God. We *dare* to believe that. He has counted us worthy to uphold that supreme teaching of His Word.