

How Satan Gains Access to Work in our Lives

By Diane W. Hawkins

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Introduction

Part 1

Having completed our study of *what* the devil can and cannot do in our lives at various levels of bondage, I would like to look at some of the *avenues* through which Satan's forces are given legal ground to affect our lives. Many Christians erroneously believe that because a believer cannot be "demon-possessed," they don't have to worry about any kind of satanic involvement in their lives. If this were so, we would not be given so many admonitions in Scripture to resist the devil and not give him a foothold (Eph. 4:26-27; 1 Peter 5:8-9); nor would we have been given instructions to put on the spiritual armor in order to stand successfully against our adversary (Eph. 6:11-17). The truth is that while the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, we are responsible to rid ourselves of those behaviors and thought patterns that make us vulnerable to attack and influence by evil spiritual beings (2 Cor. 10:5). This is part of the sanctification process for which God thoroughly equips us (2 Peter 1:3).

Instead of asking "Can a believer be "demon-possessed?" Chris Hayward, President of Cleansing Streams Ministries, believes the question should more appropriately be asked: "Is it possible for a Christian to be tempted, to be tormented and harassed by the enemy, to open themselves up to addictions and uncontrollable habits, to have a worldly mind-set and to be taken advantage of by the enemy, to be subject to divisions and strife within the church, to give way to pride, to suffer with fear, rejection, unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, shame, guilt and condemnation?"¹ All of these symptoms, which are clearly possible in the believer's life, indicate that the enemy has gotten his foot in the door and is hindering the work that God wants to do within that person to give him a fruitful and abundant life and bring glory to Himself (John 10:10; Rom. 3:23).

Adam and Eve were the only people (apart from Jesus) who ever came into life with a clean spiritual slate. Along with all that God created, they were pronounced "good" in every sense of the word (Gen. 1:31). Because God wanted them to have a choice in regard to the supernatural being they would love, honor, and depend upon to meet their needs, however, He created Lucifer as an alternative object of devotion for them and allowed him to have access to them in the Garden of Eden.

When they chose to believe and act on his words instead of those of God, man's life and relationship to the spiritual realm changed drastically. Satan (as he was then called) gained

¹ Chris Hayward, "Deliver Us from Deliverance Ministry," Cleansing Streams Ministries Newsletter (Feb. 2007), p.1.

dominion over them (Rom. 6:16). This not only affected their eternal destiny but also allowed Satan to establish an internal “rule” over the part of man’s soul that became known as the “flesh,” thus gaining access to man’s innermost drives. The flesh is so devoted to evil and self-seeking pleasures that Scripture says it absolutely *cannot* please God (Rom. 8:5-8). Even when a person is born again and transferred from the dominion of Satan into the Kingdom of God, the flesh remains as an internal dynamo thirsting for evil. While the flesh no longer has absolute authority over man’s soul and must fight against the Holy Spirit’s presence to get its way, it is generally the source of the evil connections established in a believer’s life (Rom. 7:21-25; Gal. 5:16-17; Col. 1:13).

In recent years we have come to differentiate more clearly three distinct types of such connections. “Demonic footholds” are established through ungodly character traits and ongoing patterns of sinful indulgence. They allow lower-level evil spirits, or demons, to work in and through a person’s life on a consistent basis. What we are now calling “cosmic strongholds” involve connections to higher-level, evil beings that are established when a person’s ungodly behavior patterns become more deeply embedded or when deliberate dedications to these entities have been made. The effect on the person in these cases is much more powerful and enduring. “Generational inheritances” are cosmic connections that are established through specific curses uttered against an individual and his family line or when deep patterns of unrepentant sin continue through successive generations. We will look at each of these types of bondage in this extended study.

The Heavenly Competition

Part 2

As we delve into our new study of the various kinds of activities and character traits that can potentially provide a point of access, or “legal ground,” for Satan’s work in our lives, I’d first like to sharpen our focus on the nature of the battle we are caught in between God and Satan. In our last issue I stated that I believe that God created Lucifer to be an alternative object of devotion for mankind. He wanted us to have a choice between Himself and another alluring, supernatural being. So God and Satan, as he is now called, are constantly vying with each other for our love and devotion.

They are very different in their motives and what they have to offer, however. God sincerely loves us and desires us to enter an everlasting love relationship with Him that will fulfill every longing of our God-created hearts as well as fulfill His own divine love nature. Satan, on the other hand, is incapable of love. He is a master of deception, however, and can offer thrilling and tantalizing experiences as a means of luring man away from God and into his own camp. His purposes are (1) to hinder man’s entrance into the Kingdom of God (Mat. 13:19), (2) to destroy his usefulness in God’s Kingdom should he enter it (2 Peter 1:5-9; Rev. 12:17), and (3) ultimately to use him for his own hidden purposes of gaining world domination (Rev. 19:19). (The latter requires extensive demonization and connection to high-level cosmic beings.)

When we understand the nature of this competition, we can more wisely evaluate to whom the various activities in our lives are paying homage—God or Satan. The two are intensely jealous for our loyalty (1 Cor. 10:21-22). When we, as Christians, choose to yield to Satan’s temptations and engage in thoughts and pursuits that are in line with his mindset, it strikes a grievous blow to God’s heart, just like infidelity in a marriage would do (cf. Hosea 4:12).

Occult Activities

Probably one of the most obvious ways we can “flirt” with Satan is to be involved in any of the many occult activities occurring in the world today. The focus of many of these is on gaining hidden knowledge or experiencing supernatural abilities. This is precisely the nature of the allurements that Satan used on Eve in the Garden of Eden, telling her that if she listened to him, she would have greater knowledge and be more like God Himself (Gen. 3:5).

God makes Himself very clear in stating that anyone who participates in such activities is “detestable” to Him (Deut. 18:10-12). This blatant entering of Satan’s camp instantly attracts the attention of his demonic henchmen. They will claim any evidence of interest in these activities as legal grounds for “hanging around” the person in an effort to draw him deeper and deeper. As a foothold is established in the person’s life, the effects will begin permeating his thought life, inner character, and behavior. The deeper he involves himself in occult activities, the more apt he is to establish a stronghold that connects him to increasingly higher forces of darkness.

A partial list of such activities includes:

- Astral projection
- Astrology
- Black/White magic

- Casting hexes or spells
- Clairvoyance
- Conjuraton
- Crystal ball
- Divination
- ESP
- Use of evil eye or third eye
- Fortune telling
- Horoscopes
- Levitation
- Mediumship
- Mental telepathy
- Necromancy
- Ouija board
- Palm reading
- Pendulum reading
- Psychic reading
 - Reading tea leaves
 - Seances
 - Spirit guides
 - Table tipping
 - Tarot cards
 - Voodoo
 - Werewolves & vampires
 - Water witching
 - Wicca
 - Witchcraft

Idolatry

Part 3

In our last issue we looked at the role that occult activities play in giving evil spirits access to our lives. In this issue we will look at the closely related area of idolatry. Certainly giving abeyance to any other “god” than Jehovah is another way of committing spiritual “adultery” (Ezek. 23:37). It is intensely offensive to God but greatly pleases Satan, again opening the door for his evil spirits to work in our lives.

Usually when we think of idolatry, we think of pagan idols of wood, stone, and metal, which no Christian would think of worshipping. This horrible practice was what motivated God to send severe judgment against the nation of Israel. Even in the Old Testament, however, Ezekiel taught that idolatry can be a matter of the heart and be just as offensive to God. In fact, God says He will set His face against anyone practicing idolatry in his heart, cancelling blessings and not responding to his prayers (Ezek. 14:2-8).

Idolatry of the heart can take many forms, some of which may be difficult to recognize and thus all the more dangerous to our spiritual health. Even such high priority issues as family, job, ministry, or health can become idols if we are not willing to sacrifice or put them in jeopardy to be obedient to God.

Other issues that can creep into idol status include behavioral compulsions that evidence themselves in an undue emphasis on appearance, cleanliness, orderliness, performance, or control. Usually these reflect psychological baggage acquired from childhood and may be difficult to turn from without knowledgeable and supportive inner healing directed at the root issues driving these behaviors.

Addictions are another psychological issue that can arise out of deep, unresolved pain from the past and take on idol status. Drugs, alcohol, nicotine, gambling, sex, and pornography are more obvious types of such addictions, but food and work, or constant busyness, can also be addictive behaviors used to drown out pain. In reality, they are taking the place of God, who is able to bring true healing to our deep emotional wounds (Isa. 61:1-3). This does not mean that prayer and faith alone are always sufficient to overcome an addiction, however. Often knowledgeable and compassionate help is again needed to ascertain the deep, inner roots of pain the person is endeavoring to escape and then to identify the false beliefs imbedded in them so that God can transform them through the application of truth. This is the truth that will set the person free (John 8:32).

The most frequent and grievous idols of the heart are those that arise out of the interaction of our inherent sin nature, or flesh, and the world system in which we are engulfed, both of which are prime avenues through which Satan works (Rom. 8:6-8; Gal. 5:17). A potential idol of this nature that Scripture particularly warns us about concerns our attitude towards money and material gain. Money is a powerful and alluring commodity, capable of providing security, prestige, and entertainment. The world system is so totally built around the attainment of these

things that even Christians are apt to forget that God is infinitely more capable of supplying these for us and has promised to do so if we simply make Him and His righteousness the highest priority in our lives (Mat. 6:33; Phil. 4:19). If we choose to trust in money, rather than God, to supply our needs and give us security for the future, we are engaged in the idolatry of mammon. We have put money in the place of God. Scripture clearly states that we cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24) and equates a quest for material possessions (greed and covetousness) with idolatry (Col. 3:5-6).

Because idols of the heart can be so insidious, we would all do well to examine our lives and take stock of what is most important to us. If any of these identified priorities could not be laid aside to do God's will, it needs to be recognized as an idol of the heart. If it is an issue that is serving as a psychological "crutch" for us, we need to seek out the right kind of help to explore its root. If it is any other issue, the godly response is to confess our sin to God (1 John 1:9), submit to His will and priorities for us (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:15; Eph. 2:10), and ask Him to break off any connections to the evil spiritual realm that were established in our lives because of this unrecognized "idol." Not only is He faithful to do this, but He will also open the door to greater blessings coming into our lives because of our uncompromised devotion to Him (Rom. 8:28-39).

Religious Matters

Part 4

Continuing on in our study of the avenues through which Satan and his forces gain access to our lives, we will look next at the area of religious matters and the various ways Satan can trip us up in the guise of true spirituality. While we can readily recognize the many overtly **false religions** of the world that place another supposedly divine being in the place of the true Creator God, Satan's clever deceptions can take place even amidst mainstream Christianity in our own country. Because Satan can never measure up to all that God has to offer as he competes with Him for man's devotion, he must use clever means of deception to allure man to himself.

For this reason we must be very careful about following any seemingly **aberrant teachings** of the Word. While our hearts and minds must certainly be open to growing in new understandings of Scripture, whenever a particular teaching seems contrary to the traditional views of the recognized Church, we must carefully discern whether it is truly coming from the Holy Spirit. While at times false teachings may be purely a matter of ignorance, at other times they arise from a person's own fleshly desire for acclaim or from an ungodly spirit as an effort of Satan to pull us away from Christ. Following either leads us directly or indirectly under the influence of Satan's forces and can establish a foothold for their further deceptive work in our lives (Mat. 7:15; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1; Jude).

The way to evaluate whether a seemingly new or varied interpretation of Scripture is truly coming from God is to look at the fruit in the life of the person teaching it and the effect that it has on the Church body. Wisdom that comes from God will be delivered in a spirit of humility, gentleness, and mercy. It will harmonize with other teachings of the Word and resonate with the inner spirit of other godly individuals who are well-versed in the Word. In contrast, a spirit of jealousy, belligerence, self-exaltation, hypocrisy, and strife mark the one whose wisdom is not from God, but earthly—or even demonic (Mat. 7:15-20; James 3:13-18).

Rationalism, or allowing human reasoning to supersede the Word of God in establishing truth, is one type of false teaching that Satan uses to infiltrate and weaken the “Christian Church.” Scripture clearly states that the depths of wisdom and knowledge revealed in God’s Word are beyond human comprehension and that the reasonings of even the wisest men are “useless” and “foolish” in comparison (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 3:19-20). Yet some individuals, upon encountering parts of the Bible they believe cannot possibly be taken literally or truly mean what they say, feel they are doing the Christian community a service by using human wisdom, or reasoning, to come up with an alternative explanation that “makes more sense” to them. In reality, this questioning and redefining of “what God says” exactly replicates the pattern of Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1), and falling for it can put man into the same Satanic snare that it did for Adam and Eve (Rom. 6:16). Faith in God’s Word is the defining characteristic of a true Christian. It is what binds us to God Himself (Eph. 2:8; Heb. 11:1-6; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Whenever we doubt what God says or operate outside of faith, we fall into dangerous territory, and our defense against the evil one is greatly weakened (Rom. 14:23; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:4).

Legalism is another doctrinal deviation that masquerades as true spirituality within many churches yet denies a key feature of the Gospel message. Christ came to set us free from the binding restrictions of the Law, which were never intended to make man righteous but only to lead him to the Cross where justification is made possible through faith alone. Through His sacrificial death Christ has attributed *His own* righteousness to every believer, accomplishing what the Law was incapable of doing (Rom. 4:13-24; 8:2-4; Gal. 3:19-25; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 10:1). He also imparted His Holy Spirit to indwell and guide us in holy living (Rom. 8:9-11; Gal. 5:16, 18, 22-23). To follow the Law or any man-made, external system of rules as a means to attain godliness not only denigrates the work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, but also places oneself under a curse and in bondage to Satan (Gal. 3:1-5, 10-14).

Many **divisions** within the Church also have Satanically-inspired roots, and participation in them is seen by the spiritual realm of darkness as a step in their direction, which can open the door to further solicitation on their part in one’s life. While some divisions are necessary to maintain doctrinal purity and to make God’s true servants evident (Luke 12:51-53; 1 Cor. 11:19), those based on foolish speculations, petty differences, or social status are displeasing to God (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9-11). God desires His Church to be united in one faith with

one mind and one purpose (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3-11; 12:18-27), not divided over cultural differences or minor discrepancies of Scriptural interpretation.

Rebellion

Part 5

As we continue our study of the avenues that provide open doors for Satan in our lives, I remind you again of the great competition occurring in the heavenlies between God and Satan for the devotion of mankind. This is the context within which we must understand and weigh both our actions and the inner contemplations of our hearts. No neutral territory exists in the God/Satan rivalry. A step away from one is always a step towards the other. God created us to be His perfect counterparts in love. He paid the supreme “bride price” to redeem us from Satan’s hand after the Fall and has showered us with innumerable, great, and awesome spiritual blessings (John 10:10; Eph. 1:3; 2 Peter 1:4). As a jealous lover, He desires absolute loyalty to Him in every aspect of our lives (Ex. 20:4-5; Jer. 11:3-4; Mat. 28:19-20) and is deeply grieved when we respond to Satan’s flirtations and take steps in his direction (Isa. 63:10; Ezek. 6:9).

In this issue we will look at the sin of **rebellion**, which represents a willful disobedience or turning away from God (Isa. 59:12-13; Jer. 5:22-24; Neh. 9:26) or a failure to believe Him or His promises or to treat Him with reverence (Deut. 9:23; 1 Sam. 12:14). It is most overtly evident when one turns from serving God to another false deity, such as the ancient Israelites did over and over again both before and after they entered the Promised Land (e.g., Ex. 32:1-4; Josh. 22:16; Judges 2:11-13). Perhaps more subtle is the rebellion of the person who places his own will above God’s will (Isa. 65:2), as Moses did when he struck the rock in the wilderness (Num 20:9-12), or gives greater homage to a human role-model than to God, as the Corinthian believers did (1 Cor. 1:12-13). Any of these actions represents a yielding to the flesh (Rom. 8:7), demonically-inspired lies (James 3:15), or other forms of temptation coming from within Satan’s world system (John 14:30) and puts out a “welcome mat” to his family of evil beings.

God sees rebellion as such a serious betrayal of one’s loyalty and commitment to Him that He equates it with the sins of divination and idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23), which definitely involve collusion with the evil spiritual realm. Since rebellion is putting one’s own self, another person, or a spiritual being in the place that God wants to occupy, the connection to idolatry is certainly clear.

When God instructs us, above anything else, to love Him with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might (Deut. 6:4-5), He truly means *all* of us *all* of the time. One momentary lapse in Moses’ life caused him to forfeit being able to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:12). David also suffered severe losses in his life because of his brief period of rebellion and giving in to the lusts of his flesh (2 Sam 12:9-14).

In the case of the nation of Israel, Scripture clearly speaks of the many curses they brought upon themselves because of their great and repeated rebellion against God (Deut. 28:15ff; Jer. 11:3-4; Dan. 9:9-11). These curses were probably carried out by evil beings assigned by God Himself to afflict both the nation and the individuals in it (cf., 1 Kings 22:19-23). We have no reason to believe that God responds to rebellion any differently today (Heb. 13:8).

As serious an offense as rebellion is, it does not supersede God's compassion and willingness to forgive when repentance is made, however. While some of the judgments, losses, or consequences incurred may remain, God eagerly welcomes the repentant rebel back into a place of fellowship with Himself and even to a place of blessing and prosperity (Deut. 30:1-5; Ps. 107:10-15; Luke 15:11-24). Regardless of how many times the Israelites repeated their cycles of rebellion, God always extended His compassion to them when they turned their hearts back to Him (Neh. 9:26-31). David was restored to a place of great honor, blessing, and service in His kingdom (Ps. 32:5; 2 Sam. 7:8-16) and is remembered as Israel's greatest king. Truly, God is our model of perfect love and supreme example of a forgiving heart.

Deception

Part 6

As we examine the subject of deception as a potential avenue of Satan's entrance into our lives, we come face to face with the very nature of Satan. Just as love defines the essence of God's nature (1 John 4:8), so deception defines Satan's. When we walk in love, God lives in us (1 John 4:12); when we walk in deception, we manifest the works of Satan, who is the father of all lies (John 8:44). Deception marked his work in the Garden of Eden and has been his defining mantra ever since (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9). It also marks the spiritual beings in his service (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:6) and those through whom they work (1 John 2:26; 2 Pet. 2:13; 2 John 7).

Because Satan gained dominion over man in the Garden of Eden (Rom. 6:16; Col. 1:13), he has been able to corrupt our inner being with his own nature (Jer. 17:9). (Usually we consider this to be the "flesh.") Lies and deception are therefore a natural outpouring of the unregenerate or unsanctified heart (Mat. 15:19; Rom. 1:28-29; 3:13; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). Unfortunately, when we indulge in this behavior, we are submitting to Satan's influence and opening a door through which he can establish a foothold. Should we become entrenched in such activity, a true stronghold of darkness can take hold of our lives.

Deception can take many forms: lying, bearing false witness, perjury, libel, slander; fraud, double-crossing, cheating, infidelity, false representations, false measurements, concealing of truth, exaggeration or distortion of truth, half-truths, duplicity. Matthew 5:37 says, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No';

anything beyond this *comes from the evil one*" (NIV; italics mine). That should leave little doubt that entering the realm of deception opens the door to Satan.

Believers lie to God when they don't acknowledge their sin (1 John 1:8) or when they say they know God but do not obey Him (1 John 2:4) or claim to have fellowship with Him and yet do the things that please Satan (1 John 1:6). Ananias and Sapphira lied to God about the nature of a gift they brought to Him. In this case Scripture explicitly states that Satan filled their hearts to lie against the Holy Spirit, again confirming the origin of such lies. For them, the consequences were very severe—instant death (Acts 5:1-10).

Any time we sin against God's commandments to abstain from falsehood and deception (Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11; Eph. 4:25), we reap consequences (Prov. 19:5; Jer. 9:5-9; Hos. 10:13; Micah 6:10-15). While this may not be instant death, God has repeatedly said that He will shorten the lives of those who are deceitful (Ps. 34:12-13; 52:2-5; 55:23; Prov. 21:28). He abhors all forms of deceit (Micah 6:10-13ff; Ps. 5:6; Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22), and His response to it is usually severe. The one who lied to God in the Old Testament sacrificial system was put under a curse (Mal. 1:14). God also put Israel under a curse because of the deception that occurred at Ai. He would not be with them in battle until they made things right in His sight (Josh. 7:11-12). At the very least, the deceitful person misses out on God's blessings (Ps. 32:2; 34:12-17; Matt. 6:33), and cannot come into His holy presence (Ps. 24:3-4; 101:7).

Pride

Part 7

In this issue we will look at the subject of pride and the opening it gives to Satan in our lives. Pride was the original sin of Lucifer (Ezek. 28:2, 6, 17) and is a prime characteristic he endeavors to establish in the hearts of mankind to draw them away from God. To set the stage for this he has designed the world system, over which he rules, to flaunt in ever-increasing ways that which appeals to the "lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16 NASB; 5:19). Internally, he works through the flesh, the part of the human soul over which he gained dominion at the Fall (Rom. 6:16), urging man to give in to the world's alluring appeal.

Man becomes particularly vulnerable to pride when he begins to achieve a measure of success in life, whether that is demonstrated in material possessions, accomplishments, prestige, beauty, etc. (Deut. 8:11-14; Ezek. 28:4-5, 17). Rather than recognizing God as the Source of everything that he is and has (Mat. 6:30-33; James 1:17), the prideful person is lured by Satan to take personal credit for these things. With this major slip of obedience in not giving thanks to God, Satan wins a victory and is able to establish a foothold for the further work of darkness

in the person's life (1 Thes. 5:18; Rom. 1:21). Satan's cause is advanced as he moves the person into an increasing sense of self-sufficiency with the need for God in his life being shut out (Hos. 13:6). Eventually, as the proud person continues to live in disobedience, ignoring the commandments of God, he brings himself under a curse (Neh. 9:16, 29; Ps. 119:21). In this state he may go so far as to mock God or even deny His existence (Ps. 10:4).

While the value system of the world may offer momentary gratification, it does not last. Like all the works of Satan, pride is never an asset in a man's life. It will inevitably lead to dishonor, failure, and destruction (Prov. 11:2; 16:18; 29:23; Jer. 50:32; Mat. 23:12). Once pride has gained a foothold, it begins a process of defilement within the heart that can lead to a state of total depravity (Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 1:28-32). This is an obvious manifestation of the internal work of Satan in a person's life.

In the Bible arrogance is equated with idolatry (1 Sam. 15:23; NIV), and that is what it is. It is giving glory to self that rightly belongs to God (Zeph. 2:15). The clay should never exalt itself above the potter (Isa. 29:16), which is exactly what Lucifer tried to do (Ezek. 28:2, 6, 9). Even Jesus sought the glory of the Father rather than His own glory while He was on earth (John 7:17; 8:50; cf. Heb. 1:3).

In God's sight pride is an absolute abomination (Prov. 6:16-17; 16:5; 21:4). Even as a God-fearing believer, if you have pride in your heart about any aspect of your life or think of yourself as having "arrived" or in any way doing better than others, God is displeased. This attitude will keep you from intimacy with Him. He will not allow a proud person to come into His presence (Ps. 5:5; 138:6). In fact, he will set Himself against that person (Jer. 50:31; James 4:6) and may use drastic measures to purge the pride out of his life (Lev. 26:19; Prov. 15:25; Obad. 3-4). Those who are unrepentant in their prideful ways will reap grave consequences on the Day of Judgment (Isa. 2:11-12; 13:11; Mal. 4:1)!

Pride has no place within a healthy Body of believers and is incongruent with both love and a walk in the Spirit (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 5:25-26). We are clearly instructed not to be conceited but to associate with the lowly and always esteem others as more important than ourselves (Rom. 12:16; Phil. 2:3). The wise man is not to boast in his wisdom nor the mighty man in his might nor the rich man in his riches but instead to boast in his knowledge and understanding of God, giving glory to Him and keeping His commandments (Jer. 9:23-24; 13:15; Deut. 17:20).

Anger and Hate

Part 8

As we continue to examine ways in which Satan can gain access to our lives, we will now consider the issue of anger and the potential sins it can engender. Anger

in itself is not a sin; nor does it automatically open the door to Satan (Eph. 4:26-27). Anger is the natural emotional reaction when one personally suffers a wrong or sees or hears of another suffering wrong. God often displays this kind of anger. When the flesh is in control of one's life, anger can also erupt out of jealousy, pride, or selfishness (Gen. 4:3-8; 2 Kings 5:10-12; Gal. 5:19-20). This is not a righteous anger.

Even when the root of one's anger is righteous, it still puts one on a slippery slope during which time the temptation to sin becomes much greater. I believe this is why God tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger (Eph. 4:26-27). It is not that being angry for more than one day in itself gives Satan a foothold but that it prolongs our period of intensified vulnerability to a sinful reaction that *would* do this. Anger is not a benign force; it is the arousal of oftentimes powerful internal energy that yearns for expression. If we give in to it, it is unfortunately much more likely to lead us to ungodly responses than to godly ones (Prov. 15:18; 29:22; 30:33; Ps. 37:8; James 1:20). This is why we are instructed to resolve our anger quickly (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8).

When its source is fleshly, we must learn to step back and try to view the situation as God would view it. When it is righteous anger, God's intention is for us, through the strength of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to extend forgiveness and love to our offenders, treating them with goodness rather than evil (Lev. 19:18; Luke 6:27; 1 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:13; 1 Thes. 5:15;) while we leave with God the responsibility for taking vengeance (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:43; Rom. 12:19). This is true spiritual maturity (2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Peter 2:1; 2 Peter 1:5-9).

Regardless of how righteous its origin, anger always becomes spiritually dangerous if we allow the flesh to take over. Under the direction of the flesh, it can easily fester into hatred, the mental attitude of wishing ill on the offender or desiring revenge against him (Gal. 5:19-20). This, in turn, can lead to strife (Prov. 10:12; 15:18; 29:22), violence, murder, and other cruelties (Gen. 27:41; 49:6-7; Mark 6:19). When anger moves in this direction, the door to Satan is truly opened. In the Old Testament, God decreed a curse on those who would strike out against their fellowmen, seek revenge, commit murder, or in any other way violate His commandments (Deut. 11:26-28; 27:24; Lam. 3:60-66).

While acting to harm another person may more readily be seen as sin (Ex.21:12; Lev. 19:16), God's ultimate concern is actually with the state of one's heart. What comes out of a man's heart is what defiles him (Mark 7:20-23), making the attitude of hatred as evil as the acts to which it may or may not lead (Lev. 19:17; 1 John 3:15), and God's curse is upon anyone who crosses this threshold in his heart (Deut. 7:15; 30:7). In the New Testament, John clearly states that the one who hates his brother walks in darkness (1 John 2:9, 11).

Although our knowledge of how curses are carried out is somewhat limited, we do know that at times God Himself directly sends evil spirits to bring punishment or misfortune into a person's life (Judges 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14-15; 18:10; 1 Kings 22:20-23). Perhaps at other times He merely steps aside or removes His

protection or favor from an individual or allows a sign (Gen. 4:15; Ezek. 9:4; Rev. 7:4), or a “welcome mat,” to be put on the person’s spirit to attract evil beings. Often these curses can extend over many generations (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 28:45-46; Luke 11:49-51).

On the Cross, Jesus took onto Himself all the curses that had and would come against any person (Gal. 3:13). This does not mean, however, that curses have no effect on us today (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:3). It means that we have the opportunity to claim the power of the shed blood of Jesus to nullify any curse we recognize as having legitimately come into our lives because of either personal sin, parental sin, or generational sin in our family line. When we do this with genuine repentance, they will be removed (Num. 21:6-9), but it is no more automatic than obtaining salvation is automatic since the Cross.

Bloodguiltiness

Part 9

In this issue we will examine the subject of bloodguiltiness and how it can provide an avenue of access for Satan in a person’s life. In the Old Testament, bloodguiltiness came upon any person who was in any way responsible for the unnatural death of another person. The rules regarding bloodguiltiness were quite extensive, indicating, I believe, that some important principles underlie this concept. Understanding them will help us examine our own lives and generational lines for any outstanding “blood balances” that may perhaps leave us vulnerable to the enemy.

In my initial overview of Scripture on this subject, two verses grabbed my attention. The first establishes the seriousness of destroying man’s life and is found in Genesis 9:6, which says that “whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, *for in the image of God He made man*” (NASB). Man’s creation transcends everything else that God made. As I pointed out earlier in this study, I believe that God made man in His very own image so that he could be His intimate love mate throughout eternity. Think about it: *Man is the only part of His creation that can return love to God*. Anyone who destroys God’s ultimate creation, chosen love mate, and glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:17) bears significant guilt, whether he does it intentionally or not.

The second reason that may heighten the magnitude of guilt incurred by the shedding of blood is found in Leviticus 17:11, which says, “The life of the flesh is in the blood, and *I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls*” (NASB; cf. Heb. 9:22). Blood is perhaps the most unique substance that God has created in that it carries life itself. (The Hebrew word for “life” in this verse is the same word used for “soul.”) For this reason God has designated it as the agent through which our sins can be atoned. This means that both human life and the blood that provides that life carry a special sanctity in God’s sight. Violating that sanctity in any way is a serious sin.

The concept of atonement in Scripture reflects an important principle of balance that seems to operate in the spiritual realm, not only in regard to sin in general but also in regard to the life force of man. The malicious, careless, or irreverent expenditure of life somehow disrupts a balance that can only be rectified by the sacrifice of a second life that is sanctified by God's command. When this does not occur, the person, family line, or community bearing responsibility for the death carries a bloodguiltiness, or indebtedness, that will lead to ongoing adversity in life (Deut. 20:1-9; Deut. 19:11-13—see NET Bible note 27; 1 Kings 2:31-33; Prov. 28:17), seemingly as a result of the spiritual foothold left by this unpaid blood "debt."

In the case of murder, God clearly states that the life of the murderer himself is required to pay for the bloodguiltiness of his crime (Num 35:16-21). Murder is distinguished from all other forms of manslaughter by its pre-meditated nature and underlying hatred (Deut. 19:11-12; Num. 35:16-24). Although God, in mercy, occasionally allowed a murderer to live in Old Testament times, that person came under a curse for the rest of his life, as seen in the lives of Cain and David (Gen. 4:11-12; 2 Sam. 12:9-14). Psalm 55:23 indicates that even the undetected murderer will be tormented in his own mind and live out only half his days. Again, these curses indicate a major, ongoing foothold of evil existing in these people's lives when bloodguiltiness is not properly requited.

Bloodguiltiness extends far beyond murderers, however. Anyone who participates in an act that leads to the death of an innocent man becomes bloodguilty whether he was an accomplice to murder, served as a false witness or a judge against the person in a court of law, assisted in a suicide, failed to confine a dangerous animal, or did not build a railing around a balcony of his house (Deut. 19:10; 22:8; Judges 9:24; Ex. 21:29; 23:7; 2 Sam. 2:2-16). The sailors who threw Jonah overboard in order to save their own lives knew the potential consequences of their actions and quickly offered a sacrifice and pleaded with God not to hold them guilty for the blood of an innocent man (Jonah 1:14-16). Those who killed in battle, even according to the Lord's command, were declared unclean for seven days and then had to purify themselves using water containing the ashes of a sacrificed heifer (Num. 11; 31:19-24). Their impurity indicates that they, too, were contaminated through their acts by that which was not holy and which would continue to leave a foothold of darkness in their lives if not purified.

If no blood sacrifice is made to atone for bloodguiltiness, the debt can be passed on to future generations (Ex. 20:5; 1 Kings 2:33). Jesus' words in Matthew 23:34-35 seem to imply that our entering into the same sin is what brings generational guilt, and its accompanying curses (Dan. 9:11), on us. Even when this occurs, however, man is not without redemption, as Jesus has paid the debt of all bloodguiltiness upon the Cross. If the guilty person repents and requests Jesus' shed blood to be applied to both his own sins and those of his past generations, his account will be cleared (Gal. 3:13; Col. 2:13-14; 1 John 1:9). If he does not, he may well carry those curses and a significant foothold of darkness through the remainder of his life.

Even when not acted upon, a generational inheritance may spiritually “mark” a person for enticement by evil beings into a particular sin. This, too, may be eliminated if the person comes before God and, in their place, humbly acknowledges and confesses the sins committed by his ancestors (Neh. 9:2; Dan. 9:4-19).

Violence or Mistreatment

Part 10

In this issue we will examine how the mistreatment of another person whom God has created provides a foothold for Satan in the offender’s life. Acts falling under this broad umbrella of abuse include overt physical violence, such as assault, battery, destruction, captivity, and theft, as well as hostile mental and verbal acts, such as slander, cursing, strife, conspiracy, and all forms of deception, oppression, and injustice (e.g., Ps. 10:7-10; 36:3-4; 64:2-6; Ezek. 22:29; Micah 6:10-12).

Violence has its origin in Satan (Ezek. 28:16). Therefore, anyone who exhibits violence towards another person gives evidence that Satan has already gained a foothold in his life (Mat. 8:28 is an extreme case). The manner in which this foothold is established is not unique but applicable to a broad range of other spiritual bondages as well.

Generationally, Satan gained the right to take dominion over mankind (Rom. 6:16; 7:14; Col. 1:13) at the Fall. As a result of this victory he was able to establish what has come to be known as the “flesh” in the very heart of man (Jer. 17:9; Mat. 15:19). This part of our being carries corrupted desires for self-gratification that lead us away from God and into Satan’s cleverly laid snares (Rom. 7:5, 18; 8:7-8; Eph. 2:3; James 1:14-15; 1 Peter 2:11). Because Satan could not take away man’s free will, however, we still have the ability to choose whether or not to follow the ungodly desires of the Satan-tuned flesh stirring within us (Gal. 5:16). Scripture reflects the internal struggles between good and evil that mankind has wrestled with since our earliest ancestors.

Within the context of what is ultimately a competitive battle between God and Satan for the hearts of mankind, God made His will known through the Law, which contained a host of detailed commandments prohibiting the plotting and executing of violence against the innocent (Ex. 22:21-22; 23:1-2; Lev. 19:11, 13-14, 16, 33, 35; 25:14; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 45:9-10ff). He also clearly warned that those who did not obey His commands would be cursed (Deut. 27:17-19, 24-26; Zech. 5:3-4).

In the New Testament Jesus simplified the Old Testament legal code with the command to love your neighbor as yourself (Gal. 5:14). Love does no wrong to one’s neighbor and thereby fulfills all the Old Testament commandments (Rom. 13:10).

Jesus also took all curses upon Himself at the Cross (Gal. 3:13), providing the means for them to be removed from everyone who is willing to apply His shed blood to the specific sins, generational or personal, that have brought curses into their lives. Those who do not avail themselves of this opportunity, however, will

continue to live under the curses they have reaped through their mistreatment of others.

After His resurrection Jesus made another major change in the dynamics of man's struggle against evil when He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22; James 4:5). This divine infusion (1 Cor. 6:17) serves as a powerful counterbalance to the internal drive of the flesh (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16-17). Even so, man can still choose to become a friend of the world and a companion of sinners (Gal. 6:8; James 4:4). Anyone who does so, however, puts himself on a dangerous path to becoming complicit with their ways (Ps. 1:1). As soon as he crosses the line to personal participation in plots or acts that disparage or disregard the rights of another person, that is when, I believe, God's curse comes against him.

While most of the curses mentioned in Scripture come from God rather than Satan (Micah 2:1-5; 6:10-16; etc.), God may use demons or demonized people to carry out those curses (Judges 9:23). Thus, He seemingly not only allows a spiritual door to be opened in the person's life that will allow for demonic attachment, but He actually sends demons on assignment to enter that door and bring about a specific result in the person's life.

When repentance does not occur and the person continues to involve himself with further acts of violence and injustice, the foothold that has been established can grow, potentially developing into a stronghold involving multiple demons and higher-level cosmic beings as well. Such a situation can only be reversed by God in accordance with the will of the person (Luke 11:21-22).

Sexual Sins

Part 11

In this issue we will focus on how sexual sins enable Satan to gain access to one's life. As I have examined this issue in God's Word, He has deeply impressed upon me that the key to understanding His principles regarding sexual purity lies in fully comprehending the reality of His union with every believer. All too many Christians seem to view God as a wonderful, but distant and separate, entity to whom they can connect through prayer and worship when they choose to do so rather than truly grasping the union we have with Him on a moment to moment basis. His Spirit actually becomes one with our spirits, and our bodies become "temples" of the Holy Spirit as well as integral parts of Christ, who is one with the Father (John 14:20; 17:20-23; Rom. 8:9; cf. 12:1; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15-20).

Many also fail to understand the uniqueness and sanctity of the union that takes place between two individuals when they engage in sexual intercourse. God clearly states that through this act a husband and a wife so completely share themselves with each other that they move from being two distinct individuals to becoming "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5-6). This ultimate experience of human unity is designed to mirror the spiritual unity between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:28-32). Just as this spiritual unity is strictly limited to those truly within God's family, so also the act that brings sexual unity is sanctioned only between a husband and a wife within the context of marriage (Heb. 13:4).

When the true nature of these unions is grasped, the Christian cannot escape the reality that engaging in illicit sex brings God Himself into the ungodly sexual union (1 Cor. 6:15). This is what makes the commitment of acts such as adultery,

incest, rape, homosexuality, or bestiality by Christians so grievous. God does not tolerate such defilement of His “temple” (Rom. 12:1) or of the marriage covenant (Heb. 13:4) and has proclaimed curses in the form of severe punishment upon all who do so. Sometimes this was death under the Old Testament Law although at other times grace was and is extended (John 8:3-11) and the curse carried out in the form of separation from the community of faith; barrenness or other physical ailments; depleted mental, spiritual, and emotional health; or lack of favor, justice, prosperity, or blessing (Lev. 18:6-29; 20:12-22; Num. 5:20-27; Deut. 27:20-23; 28:15-45; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 5:1-6; 1 Thes. 4:3-6; Heb. 13:4; Jude 6-7). The role of Satan in fulfilling these curses is seen most clearly in the New Testament when Paul deliberately turned an immoral man over to Satan, seemingly for some form of bodily destruction (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

God's sacred intention for sexual intercourse as a bonding of a man and woman into a lifelong, one-flesh, marital relationship is inescapable in His Word. In the Old Testament Law, which revealed His standard of righteousness to mankind (Rom. 7:7, 13), He directed those who engaged in pre-marital sex to proceed to marriage (Ex. 22:16; Deut. 22:28-29) and strongly opposed the separation of those so bound (Mal. 2:13-16; Mat. 19:3-8). In the New Testament He reiterated His disdain for divorce and stated that even when divorce occurs, the sexual union established within the marriage is not to be violated through remarriage while the previous spouse is still alive. To do so would be committing adultery (Mat. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Rom. 7:1-3).

With the high standard that God has set regarding sexual relationships, man is caught in a struggle between obedience to Him and the allurements of Satan, who works subtly and yet powerfully through the flesh and the world system to get even Christians to lower their standards in this area (John 14:30; Rom. 7:14-25; Eph. 6:12; 1 Peter 2:11). Unfortunately, just as Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden, any time we say yes to Satan and go against God's commandments, we bring ourselves under the bondage of Satan and the curse of God, even in the age of grace in which we live (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-19; Rom. 6:15-16).

Through God's grace one can certainly achieve forgiveness, deliverance, restored fellowship with Him, and the removal of curses when confession and repentance of these sins occurs (1 John 1:6-9; Gal. 3:13). Anyone who continues in sin, however, will not only remain in bondage to Satan but will also deeply grieve the heart of God (Matt. 6:24; John 14:15; Rom. 6:16; 1 Thes. 4:7-8).

An Unforgiving Heart

Part 12

In this issue we will examine how the lack of forgiveness provides a foothold for Satan in one's life. The grievousness of this sin must not be underestimated as it is integrally related to our respect for the very blood of Jesus, which represents His excruciating, but perfect, payment for every man's sin. Though all may not avail themselves of it, He offers it to all, even the vilest of sinners (Rom. 5:8). When we maintain hate and a desire for revenge in our hearts towards anyone for whom Christ died, we are not walking in God's spirit of grace (Heb. 12:15). How can we who have been forgiven a lifetime of sin through the precious blood

of Jesus deny forgiveness to another whose particular sin just happens to affect our lives (Matt. 18:21-35)?

When we do this, not only do we show grave disrespect for Jesus' shed blood that paid for our own sins, but Scripture clearly states that we mar our relationship with God, stepping out of fellowship with Him and into the darkness, where we lose the guiding light of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 3:5:6; Mat. 6:15; 1 John 2:9, 11). In this darkened state Satan is able to take advantage of us, activating our flesh and leading us into self-seeking acts of hostility, strife, and even murder. Within a local church this foothold gained through a lack of forgiveness can destroy the unity of the Spirit within the entire body (2 Cor. 2:10-11; Gal. 5:19-20; 1 John 3:15).

A lack of forgiveness also keeps us emotionally tied to the offender and the wound of his offense constantly open. The longer we hold hate and bitterness in our hearts, the more destructive these poisonous attitudes become, adversely affecting many aspects of our lives, including our health and relationships (Heb. 12:15).

God never intended that we serve as judges and avengers of those who wrong us. This is His role (Rom 12:19). When we step into it, we bring many negative effects on ourselves. When we relinquish this position to Him, we not only give our offenders over to a much higher judicial authority (Gen. 18:25; Col. 3:25; Heb. 10:31) but we are also released from the many ill effects of an unforgiving heart. This is God's way for us to experience emotional health in spite of being grievously wronged. What a gift! This is His loving intent behind all of His instructions to us to forgive (Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Forgiveness is always intended to work for our benefit!

While forgiveness relinquishes all projections of ill will towards our offenders, it does not necessarily mean reconciling or resuming the relationship as if the offense never occurred. God extends His forgiveness to the whole world (John 3:16), but only when man does his part in repenting from his sin and accepting God's forgiveness can he be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Reconciliation requires the proper attitudes and actions of both parties. Forgiveness, on the other hand, can be granted and its benefits achieved regardless of the attitude of the offender.

Forgiveness also does not necessarily preclude confronting the person concerning his wrong, but this must always be done with care and be free from any spirit of hate or revenge (Lev. 19:17-18; Gal. 6:1). Taking an individual before an ungodly court for our benefit alone is not in line with forgiveness. God would rather that we bear the wrong than do this (1 Cor. 6:1-8). When our offender is a fellow believer, God lays out a procedure through which we may progressively confront him: first privately, then before two or three witnesses, and then before the church if necessary. If he still does not repent, we are instructed to treat him as an outsider, unable to partake of the fellowship and ordinances of the Church (Matt. 18:15-17). If and when genuine grief and repentance occurs, however, this discipline should be lifted and replaced with loving comfort (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

Walking in God's spirit of grace always requires us to be guided by love, even toward those who have wronged us. We are to do good to them and respond to their genuine needs, endeavoring to overcome their evil acts with our good deeds (Ex. 23:4; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 12:20-21). This brings favor from God (1 Peter 2:20).

Implanted Thoughts

Part 13

In this issue we will explore the way that Satan is able to gain access to our lives through implanted thoughts. While modern man generally thinks of his mind as being the origin of his thoughts, Scripture puts a much stronger emphasis on the heart, describing the heart as the seat of motives, integrity, and conscience (1 Chron. 28:9; 29:17; Heb. 10:22) and the origin of thoughts and actions (Mat. 15:18-20; Luke 2:35; Acts 5:4), reflecting our true inner person (Prov. 23:7; 1 Peter 3:4), character, and commitments.

Satan gained access to man's heart at the Fall when he took dominion over God's highest creation (Col. 1:13). While God had created man perfectly good (Gen. 1:31), Satan so corrupted man's heart (Jer. 17:9) that God regretted having made man, leading to His decision to destroy all but a chosen few in a worldwide Flood (Gen. 6:5-7). Even after this, God acknowledged that the inclination of man's heart is continuously evil (Gen. 8:21). This is the ongoing state of the unregenerate heart (Eph. 2:3; 4:17-18). Jesus described it as the source of all that defiles a man (Matt. 15:18-20).

Satan's access to this point of origin for man's thoughts and actions applies to both believers and non-believers, as is clearly evidenced by the impact he had on the thoughts, ideas, schemes, and actions of Judas, Peter, and Ananias (Matt 16:21-23; Luke 22:31-32; Mark 14:66-72; John 13:2; Acts 5:3). Some of his influence may be exerted through evil spirits, which can also be used for purveying false rumors (2 Kings 19:7; 2 Thes. 2:2) and instilling their own breed of wisdom that leads to further self-centered corruption (James 3:14-15).

Satan is also able to affect mental comprehension, which is seen most drastically when people have become completely taken over by demons, like the man of the Gadarenes (Mark 5:1-16). More subtly, Satan can also blind the minds of unbelievers and influence what they retain in their hearts when they hear the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:4; Mark 4:15). Doing effective evangelism thus often involves a spiritual battle to release Satan's hold on a person's mind and to dislodge the lies he has planted in it. Paul describes this battle in 2 Cor. 10:4-5, stating that it requires the use of powerful spiritual weapons provided by God, such as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The truth of God's Word delivered in the power of His Holy Spirit is the mighty agent that is able to bring every false conception concerning the Gospel into alignment with the truth of Christ.

The battle for the sanctity of one's heart and mind does not end with salvation, however. Because of Satan's often unchallenged influence on the mind before this point, every new believer must make a conscious effort to renew and sanctify his mind through the washing of the Word, allowing it to establish truth in his innermost being (Ps. 51:5-7; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22-24; 5:26). Learning to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to walk consistently in tune with Him is also vitally important. As His fruit is able to take root and grow in our hearts, it will crowd out the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-17, 22-23; Eph. 5:18-20). This will be a daily

battle, however. The powerful influence of the flesh will be with us until we cross over into eternity (Rom. 7:14-25). We will always be vulnerable to Satan's clever attempts to draw our minds away from a true devotion to Christ, as he did in the Garden of Eden with Eve (Gen. 3:1-6; 2 Cor. 11:3).

In order to protect our hearts and minds from Satan's efforts to pollute them, we must make a conscious effort to keep our minds filled with that which we know is from God. Leaving our minds in an idle, or passive, state would seem to give Satan a ready opportunity to fill them with his thoughts. This is why, I believe, God gives us specific directives to focus our minds on what is honorable, pure, and right and on the things that pertain to the kingdom of heaven rather than on earthly things (Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:2; 1 Peter 1:13). We should also be thinking about what will stimulate others to love and good works and the advancement of God's Kingdom (Heb. 10:24). As we learn to fill our empty moments with worship and prayer, the peace of God will fill and guard our hearts and minds from the enemy's intrusion (Rom. 8:6; Col. 3:15-16; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Thes. 5:16-18; Jude 20-21).

The Wisdom of the World

Part 14

through the thoughts he is able to implant there (Matt 16:21-23; John 13:2; Acts 5:3). In this issue we will look at how he can gain a foothold in our lives through our responses to the corrupted wisdom he has implanted in the minds of others (James 3:14-15).

While God is the ultimate source of all wisdom, He created Satan, the anointed cherub, as a being "full of wisdom." Satan, however, corrupted his God-given wisdom through pride and selfish ambition (Ezek. 28:12, 14, 17). Today Satan's wisdom is still saturated with these same characteristics (Isa. 47:10; James 3:14-15). It is also crafty and deceitful, just like Satan himself (Jer. 17:9; 1 Cor. 3:19). Satan uses his corrupted wisdom to lure man away from God, and no one living in the world today is immune from his attempts. His first step of success comes when he succeeds in causing doubts in our minds concerning the Word of God. This was his approach to lure Eve into sin (Gen. 3:1-6), and it has been a continued tactic of his all through history. The New Testament writers were very aware of this and warned their converts not to be shaken in their beliefs through conflicting messages coming through false teachers or deceptive spirits of darkness (Acts 20:29-31; 2 Cor. 11:3-4; 2 Thes. 2:1-2; 2 Peter 3:17). Having received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the sacred writings of Scripture to guide us in truth and godly wisdom, we have no excuse for succumbing to Satan's sly distortions of truth and corrupted wisdom (Ps. 119:104, 128; John 14:16-17; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:13-17; 1 John 2:18-20, 24-27).

If we ignore these divine resources, however, we can easily slip from doubt to unbelief. This need not be a plunge into full-blown atheism, but a subtle shift away from firmly believing all that the Word of God teaches as truth. Sinking even to this level gives Satan a major victory, as we cut ourselves off from the

power of God in so many ways. Unbelief hinders the release of His wisdom and answers to our prayers as well as His power to work miracles and perform major acts of deliverance through us (Mat. 13:58; 14:17-20; 28-31; Heb. 3:19; James 1:5-7).

Once we begin suppressing the truth of God's Word in our minds through doubt and unbelief, our discernment and ability to resist being taken in by the world's wisdom is greatly compromised (Rom. 1:18). At best, we allow ourselves to be guided by a far inferior source of wisdom, which God considers useless and foolish in comparison to His own (Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 23:18-19; 1 Cor. 2:16; 3:18-19; Col. 2:2-3). At worst, we allow a foothold of darkness to be established in our minds should we be deceived and begin following the demonic wisdom which Satan has so adeptly intermingled with the wisdom of man operating within the world system.

Even the Church has been contaminated by ungodly wisdom, as Satan has disbursed within it his own servants disguised as godly leaders (Matt. 7:15; 13:24-30; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Tim. 3:13). Because of this, believers must be constantly on alert (Mat. 10:16; 1 Peter 5:8). Paul warned us not to be captivated and led astray by those who espouse strange-sounding doctrines and philosophies of men, focus on myths or things that are purely speculation, or engage in pointless genealogical studies or debates and arguments about words (Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-5, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14, 23).

Other things that should raise red flags for us are religious leaders who create their own set of regulations and legalistic requirements that may have the appearance of wisdom but are really derived from their own fleshly minds or deceitful spirits (Col. 2:18-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). Caution is also needed within churches open to the present day ministry of the Holy Spirit, as even the elect can be led astray by false visions, prophecies, words of knowledge, manifestations of the "Spirit," or miracles that have their origin in Satanic power or human imagination rather than in God (Jer. 14:14; 23:16; Mat. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Col. 2:18-19; Mark 13:22). We must never blindly accept any of these without testing and confirming them (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2)

Love of the World

Part 15

On the surface "the world," as often used in Scripture, would seem to be an expression of man's way of life without God. More accurately, however, it reflects the way man lives not only without God but also under the insidious influence of Satan (John 14:17; 17:25; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 2:16; 3:1). Satan has had direct access to man's inner being ever since the Fall, when he gained dominion over him (Rom. 6:16; Col. 1:13). I believe his inner domain is represented by what came to be called "the flesh" in the New Testament, as it is described as being without any good, hostile towards God, and totally incapable of pleasing Him (Rom. 7:18; 8:7).

By working covertly through the flesh of every person who is not surrendered to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16), Satan is also able to exert significant dominion over the moral environment of the world as well as its political maneuverings (Dan. 10:13, 20; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:1-3). The only deterrent to this dominion is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit within the children of God and the competing kingdom which He is establishing in their hearts (Luke 17:20-21; 2 Thes. 2:1-10). Satan can never usurp the ultimate authority that Jesus Christ has over all of heaven and earth or that the Holy Spirit has in hearts that are yielded to Him (Mat. 28:18; 1 John 4:4).

Satan's initial ploy within his sphere of dominion seems to be to draw man's focus away from God and onto self and pleasure. This is readily seen in the self-centered, materialistic bent of the world, which is characterized by the lust of the flesh (what feels good to self), the lust of the eyes (what looks good to self), and the pride of life (what lifts up self) (1 John 2:16; cf. Eph. 2:1-3). While this hedonistic way of life may have a façade of glory (Luke 4:6) and even a measure of wisdom (Luke 16:8), its glory is transient (Isa. 40:6-8) and its wisdom lacking (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19-20). In the end it leads to death (Prov. 14:12).

While believers have been redeemed from Satan's dominion, we must unfortunately still live within it. Jesus, who lived and walked in the world Himself, understood its pervading darkness and the spiritual battle we would daily confront as we carry on His work on earth. He prayed not that God would remove us from the world but that He would protect us from its ruler, the evil one (Mat. 28:19-20; John 12:31; 14:30; 15:19; 17:15, 18; Eph. 6:11-12; 1 Peter 5:8).

God has indeed given us everything that we need to triumph over the world and the underlying hand of Satan that wants to entrap us in it (2 Cor. 10:4; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 1 John 5:4-5). Our first and foremost resource is the Holy Spirit imparted to us at salvation (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13). His union with our own spirit gives us the awesome potential to experience His own divine nature within us! To the extent that we allow Him to have pre-eminence in our hearts and to transform our lives to manifest the character of God, we will be able to overcome the desires of the flesh and escape the corruption of the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 4:19; 5:16; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 2 Peter 1:4). By walking in truth, righteousness, peace, and faith, the character traits which God designed to serve as our spiritual armor, we will also be protected from the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10-16).

In addition to this vital internal submission, our success is also crucially dependent on our external actions. Just as a soldier engaged in active service for his country separates himself from the affairs of life, so our calling as ambassadors for the kingdom of God requires a diligent separation from the things of the world (2 Cor. 5:20; 2 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11-12; James 1:27). Paul tells us to consider ourselves dead to them (2 Cor. 5:14-15, 17; Gal. 6:14; Col. 3:5). The reason for such a strict call to separation is that even by dabbling around the periphery of worldly activities, whether in real life or vicariously through the TV, internet, or fantasies of our own minds, we enter Satan's playground. Once our appetite is whetted to desire more, Satan has won a victory and gained a stronger inroad into our lives (James 1:14-15). We have essentially defected into

enemy territory, choosing Satan's deceptive pleasures over the pure and genuine love of God. We cannot enjoy both (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15).

Fantasy or the Mind's Eye

Part 16

Another way that Satan is able to access man is through the realm of fantasy, or the "mind's eye." While fantasy is a God-given, mental capacity enabling us to enhance our lives through unlimited creativity and invention, it was quickly contaminated by darkness at the Fall. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, their "eyes" were opened to a whole new source of insight and knowledge. While this source is not precisely identified, it gave them an awakened perception of evil that was similar to what other spiritual beings had. It also conveyed onto them a sense of shame about their naked bodies, which did not come from God (Gen. 3:5, 7-11, 22). It thus seems that this new source of insight and knowledge was the evil spiritual realm.

As man's mind was opened to input from this realm, Satan was able to affect not only his thoughts but also his imagination and fantasies. Moses wrote of how quickly the imaginations of man's heart became corrupted to devise wickedness (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Paul described the role that these Satan-inspired speculations play in man's downward road to destruction (Rom. 1:21ff; cf. Eph. 4:17), eventually becoming mental strongholds that will only yield to the spiritual weapons of warfare supplied by God to the believer (2 Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 6:17-18).

While man's imaginative capacity does not always involve visualization, God did give us the ability to picture things on an internal, mental screen of sorts. On this screen we can consciously choose to visualize memories that actually happened or to imagine scenes of our own design. Our unconscious minds also use this screen as they unfold our nocturnal dreams. If we choose to, we can even allow other people to direct us in what we project on this screen through guided imagery or hypnosis.

Most important to our concerns here is the fact that supernatural beings can project onto this screen as well. Sometimes God speaks through supernatural dreams or visions, which are seen with the mind's eye (Num. 12:6; Dan. 2:28; Joel 2:28). Unfortunately, Satan's access to the mind gives him the opportunity to affect what is displayed on this screen as well. While his ability to intrude on what truly comes from God is doubtful, He could certainly direct manipulate, distort, or add to what comes from our own minds and potentially give a complete vision, dream, or false memory of his own. Unlike God's use of this screen, however, Satan would seemingly prefer to deceive us about the source of what comes from him so we think it is coming from either God or ourselves rather than from him.

For this reason we need discernment in evaluating anything that we view through the mind's eye, including memories, dreams, and visions. The memories most susceptible to contamination are those that are not consciously remembered but seemingly surface from a dissociated or subconscious place in the brain. In my book *Multiple Identities: Understanding and Supporting the Severely Abused*, I describe distinctive characteristics that authenticate true, dissociated memories and can be used to differentiate them from deceptive images coming from Satan or one's own imagination.

False visions are mentioned much more specifically in Scripture, sometimes being linked with divination, indicating a possible occult source (Jer. 14:14; Ezek. 13:6-7, 9), and sometimes being clearly attributed to the person's imagination (Jer. 23:16; Ezek. 13:2, 17). While dreams are normally the result of the unconscious mind processing unresolved issues or irrelevant material from one's life, Satan can apparently infiltrate these or produce night visions of his own (Job 4:12ff) just as God chooses to do from time to time (Gen. 20:3-7; 28:12-15; 31:11-13, 24; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Matt. 1:20-21; 2:13, 19-20).

We are perhaps most vulnerable to deception when we deliberately seek a hidden memory, a visual manifestation from God, or maybe even a God-given dream. In these cases our own anticipation may subconsciously influence our imaginations to come up with what is expected, or our passivity in waiting for a response may allow Satan to intrude. Those facilitating inner healing do well to recognize these possibilities. While Satan's deceptions are generally counterproductive to healing, this is not true for imagination, which is a powerful agent often deliberately used in secular circles for the healing of trauma.