



What the Devil Cannot Do

(2007)

After concluding our study of “The Devil Made Me Do It,” in which we looked at many of the ways that Satan is able to affect man, I thought it might be helpful to list some of the things that Satan *cannot* do. While given great freedom to work amongst the world of mankind during this phase of history (Eph. 2:2; John 12:31; 14:30), his capabilities are not infinite; nor may he operate outside the bounds of God’s sovereignty. Satan always has, and always will, report to the One who created him for His own purposes (Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Kings 22:19).

1. He cannot snatch the redeemed away from God

When a person puts his faith in Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross for the forgiveness of his sins, he enters into a covenant relationship with God that is anchored in the shed blood of Jesus and sealed with God’s oath (Heb. 6:17-20; 8:6; 9:15). No other being has the spiritual authority to supersede these divine acts and cancel this covenant. No matter how greatly Satan may affect a believer or how far he may lead a believer astray, he cannot nullify his salvation (John 3:16; 10:27-29; 1 John 4:4; 5:13).

2. He cannot touch the “new self” begotten by God.

When we are saved, we are spiritually born anew as children of a holy God. From that point on we carry within ourselves not only the human seed of our earthly parents but also God’s imperishable, holy seed (1 Peter 1:23). This seed gives rise to our “new self,” which is replicated in the righteousness and holiness of our heavenly Father (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24). His holy seed can only create holy life, and just as Satan cannot touch our holy God, he cannot touch our “new self.” While theologians debate the fact, many believe that this part of us cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

The only part of a Christian that Satan can affect is the flesh, that part of the soul over which he gained dominion due to Adam and Eve’s sin (Rom. 6:16; Col. 1:13) and on which he stamped his own rebellious and deceitful nature (Jer. 17:9; John 8:44). The flesh continues to be active even in the believer, leaving the mind with the ever-present choice of determining which part of him will lead his thoughts and actions: the flesh, which has been imprinted by Satan, or the “new self,” which has been begotten by God (Rom. 7: 14—8:14; Gal. 5:16-17; Eph. 4:17-24).

3. He cannot make a person sin.

Satan can lead us to water but he cannot *make* us drink. He can even “salt the oats” to make us crave that water, but we are still responsible for any sinful acts in which we *choose* to engage. For every temptation that Satan brings into our lives, God faithfully provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). If we choose, instead, to give in to the temptation, our sin is a product of our own flesh-driven lusts (James 1:14-15).

4. He cannot overpower a person’s free will.

Our free will is an irrevocable gift from God (Rom. 11:29). Unless a person has willfully chosen to enter a covenant relationship with Satan or another pagan deity, these evil cosmic beings cannot automatically execute their will in a person’s life. They can only do so when the person (or in DID, a part of the person) voluntarily relinquishes control to them. Even though a person may have legal grounds or generational inheritances that allow the beings to be connected to them, we believe quite strongly that they cannot act out in the person’s life without permission being granted by some part of the person.

5. He seemingly cannot instigate a major, cosmic-level assault against one of God's children in whom he has no legal ground to do so without direct permission from God.

Admittedly, this is a conclusion drawn from limited information, but it is not without scriptural support. While every believer can potentially be subjected to demonic whim and harassment, major offensives coming from Satan or the higher echelons of the evil spiritual ranks (which we refer to as "cosmic beings") can seemingly only be launched with permission from God.

Satan and his cohorts may prowl around looking for good candidates to "devour" (1 Peter 5:8), but (at least when believers are involved), they seemingly have to go before God to gain His permission before they can carry out their plans. This is precisely the picture that is given in the book of Job, which I believe is meant to provide a glimpse into the interactions between God and Satan that can potentially affect our lives. In his "roaming about on the earth," Satan had selected Job as a desired target, but he had to seek permission from God before he could execute his plan, which was to afflict Job with severe hardships to see how strong his faith in God really was. God granted that permission but set distinct bounds beyond which Satan could not go. He had to operate under the sovereignty of God and abide by these restrictions (Job 1:6-12; 2:3-6).

Another example in Scripture is Satan's request of God that he be allowed to "sift" Peter like wheat. Again, permission was granted but with Jesus stepping into the spiritual milieu with His prayers so that Satan's assault would not result in Peter's faith being lost (Luke 22:31-32).

While we don't know the criteria God uses in determining whether He will grant Satan's requests, it may have to do with the potential good that God sees He can bring through the affliction or trial that Satan proposes (Rom. 5:3-5; Heb. 12:10-11; James 1:2-4). Both Job and Peter reaped major spiritual benefits from the trials of their faith that came from Satan's hand. God also allowed Satan to afflict Paul through his "thorn in flesh" because it served God's purpose of keeping Paul from exalting himself after having the awesome privilege of visiting the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-4, 7-9).

6. He cannot create.

God is the author and creator of *all* things. The Bible leaves no room for any source of creation other than the Godhead, strongly specifying that apart from Him nothing else has ever come into being (John 1:3; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16). God's creative work includes both the animate and the inanimate, the visible and the invisible, absolutely everything that exists in both the earthly realm and the spiritual realm (Col. 1:16). In contrast, all that Satan can create are illusions.

7. He can offer no positive rewards to his followers

He cannot offer peace or any hope of a joyful eternity (cf. Ps. 16:11; John 10:9-10; 16:33; Rom. 15:13). In fact, nothing that Satan has to offer man is truly satisfying. Although he is superlative in his description of the pleasures to be found on the path he lures man onto (Gen. 3:1-6; Mat. 4:8-9), those who follow after him will ultimately discover the illusive nature of his promises and find themselves quickly sliding down a road that leads to despair and death rather than the glorious life they were promised (Prov. 14:12; Rom. 6:23).