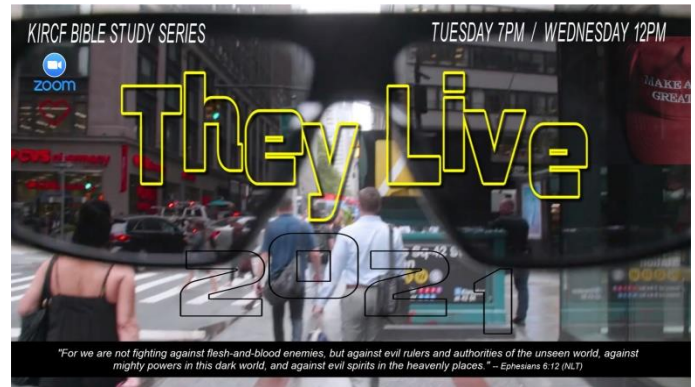


“Lies, Division, Fighting” - What’s going on in the world today ... *“For Real?”*

With all of the *chaos and confusion* that is taking place in the world today ... battle lines being drawn, truth vs. lies, good vs. evil, hate vs. love, rational vs. irrational etc. ... with no reasonable or logical answers as to why ... the question must be raised: *“What’s really going on?”*



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Is there something happening behind what we are seeing? Is there a spirit world? Are evil spirits real? If so, what are they? Where did they come from? And what about demon possession? Does this phenomenon really exist in our world today? What does the Bible have to say ...

“Now the Spirit speaketh, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron...” (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

But what are *“seducing spirits”* and *“doctrines of demons”*? Most psychologists and many theologians believe demons to be mere figments of the imagination, and regard *“demon possession”* as nothing more than an unscientific way of explaining mental illness. But does the Bible support such views?

We must first recognize the reality of the demonic. The Bible is clear about this. All you have to do is read the gospel accounts of Christ’s numerous encounters with demons (example Matthew 4:22, 24; 7:22; 8:16, 31; 9:33-34; 10:8; 12:24ff; 15:22; 17:18).

Moreover, a cursory survey of these passages reveals that demon-possession is real. But on the other hand, these same passages inform us that Jesus not only cast out demons from those who were possessed ... but that He healed *“the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics”* (Matthew 4:24).

In other words, there were those with numerous afflictions, both spiritual and physical. Take for instance the fact that Matthew records that Christ healed epileptics ... but in addition also healed those who were demon possessed. These were, according to Matthew’s account, two different classes of people in need of healing. By way of contrast, there were those who were demon-possessed who were gripped by epileptic-like seizures (Mark 9:18). This is to say, not all epileptics were demon-possessed and not all demon-possessed people were epileptics.

The Scriptures appear to recognize the fact that some epileptics suffered from a medical condition (Matt. 4:24) ... while others suffered from a spiritual malady (i.e., demon possession, Matt. 17:14-18).

DEMONS ARE REAL

The Bible is clear: Satan is a literal, personal being; and demons are spiritual *personalities* that *think, reason, speak, and express fear*, and under certain conditions, can enter into and *possess* the mind of a human being! The truth is, all attempts to see demons and the devil as “mere mental diseases” and the “personification of evil” are really attempts to rationalize something that seems irrational.

In exploring the relationship between demonic influences and mental disorders, we must remember that the question is not whether Satan is involved in mental disorders; rather, it is a question of how he is involved.

Mental disorders, like any other human malady, came with the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world. All human suffering can be traced, in part, to that momentous event. Satan's role in the Fall, and thus in all earthly ill, must be acknowledged. Discerning the means of his involvement in mental disorders is the issue at hand!

Satan (and demons in general) are capable of performing supernatural phenomena, or imitations of the Holy Spirit that are often difficult for unsaved individuals to distinguish between. As a result, their work is often deceitful and can, at times, appear as both honest and good-natured at first-glance. The Bible also teaches us that demons are spirits.

In Matthew 12:42, 45, the Bible states: *“When the unclean spirit is gone and out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none... Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.”* Scripture often refers to demons as “unclean spirits,” “wicked spirits,” “dumb spirits,” or “vicious spirits.” In Ephesians 6:12, the Bible states: ***“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”***

Bible doctrine also shows us that demon spirits are both real and personal ... and even spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ during His time on Earth, and recognized His position of supreme authority. In Matthew 8:31, the Bible gives us a recorded conversation that demons carried on with Christ. It states: *“So the demons besought Him, saying, if thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.”* Likewise, Mark 1:23-24.

As these verses demonstrate, demon spirits are capable of both entering and controlling man and beasts. **Once they get complete control of an individual, the victim is often completely helpless.** Only the power of God can break demon control and deliver the individual from his power!

God says we should not be “unaware of [the devil’s] schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11)... So let us look practically at Eight (8) strategies employed by Satan to steal away and destroy the life God designed for us (John 10:10).

1. DECEPTION ... Creating and Spreading Lies

As we examine passages discussing the work of Satan and demons, please notice how often we are told that ***they are at work creating and spreading lies*** that we are then led to believe. Satan is said to be the “*father of lies*” (John 8:44) and one who seeks to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9; 20:3, 8).

We see this in the first sin of humans as Satan distorted and called into question what God said to Eve — even saying *that God lied and she would not die if she ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil* (Genesis 3). This strategy continued, as deceiving spirits appear in the Old Testament; and Paul says we too, can be deceived (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

Part of this deception is how Satan and demons present themselves, being “**false apostles**” and disguised as “servants of righteousness” just as Satan disguised himself as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). This includes false teaching, with Paul noting that teaching comes from demons; this teaching is not to worship demons explicitly, but can come in the form of various rules about the world (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

False wonders (a form of deception) are even performed to support these lies and untruths (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 16:14). These lies can be false teachings in the church, and a method of pulling people away is to plant false believers in the church community (see Matthew 13:39).

This reality means that we need to be discerning in the truths we are hearing and be sure to test them. Just as we are to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), we are to test teachings and make sure they are found in the Word of God and not from other places.

2. OBSTACLES – Preventing the Truth From Being Heard

In addition to spreading false truths, Satan and demons also hinder the Word of God from being heard by people. We see this image in Jesus’s parable of the sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8) as Satan prevents some people from hearing the message and thus they do not believe and produce fruit.

The Apostle Paul says *that Satan blinds the eyes of some people so they will not believe* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Daniel 10:12-14 shows that demonic forces seek to stand as obstacles to God's angels that work in response to prayer. People can even be obstacles, whether it is Peter when he tells Jesus that he should not go to the cross (Matthew 16:23), or a figure like Elymas the magician who tries to turn someone away from the faith and is called a **"son of the devil"** (Acts 10:37-38).

We also read about people not being able to travel to share the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:18), or being thrown in prison (Revelation 2:10). Therefore, persecution is a tactic of Satan ... but sometimes that is not necessary (as persecution can also display the deep faith of individuals) ... and distraction is just as effective — if not more so! ***May we examine the obstacles around us and see these things as spiritual warfare!***

3. ALTERNATIVES – Inspiring False Religions

We also read that other religious systems and false religions are the work of Satan and his demons. A number of places in Scripture link false practices with the work of the opposition (Galatians 4:3-9; Colossians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 10:20). In the Old Testament there is a link between idols and the ancient world (false gods) and demons (Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Leviticus 17:7; Psalm 106:36-38).

The reality is when people do not worship God, they are ultimately choosing to worship these demons, either directly or indirectly (see Revelation 9:20) ... and thus can be said to be under the power and influence of Satan (see Acts 26:18).

4. AFFLICTION – Inflicting Pain and Suffering

The story of Job shows how his suffering was orchestrated by Satan, with the ultimate hope that Job would curse God and die (of course Job proves himself faithful).

When Jesus heals a woman who had a physical ailment that caused her to be unable to straighten herself, Jesus said that she had been bound by Satan for 18 years ... further demonstrating that physical ailments could be the work of the devil (Luke 13:16; see also Acts 10:38).

We also see demons harming people, either directly or indirectly (Mark 5:5; 9:18); they can also create physical limitations such as making someone unable to speak (Matthew 9:32; Mark 9:17) or hear (Matthew 12:22). Both Paul (1 Thessalonians 3:5) and Peter (1 Peter 5:9) link the concept of suffering with the work of Satan ... showing that Satan tries to use suffering to tempt people away from faith. In 1 Samuel 16:14-23 we read about an evil spirit afflicting and tormenting Saul; we aren't sure how this spirit inflicts pain (if physical or mental), but it does show that spirits afflict people.

We aren't sure what Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" described in 2 Corinthians 12:7 was exactly (likely a physical ailment), but he describes this as a "*messenger of Satan*", linking it to Satan's work. While Satan might have used that ailment to try to hurt Paul's faith, Paul found a greater awareness of God's grace and strength that works in our weakness. ***We need to remember that what Satan intends as being evil ... God can use for our good and His glory!***

5. ACCUSATIONS – Bringing Up Our Sins To Show That We Are Unworthy

Please note, the title "*Devil*" has connections with the idea of slander or accuser, bringing accusations against God; and Revelation 12:10 calls him "*the accuser.*" That passage says that Satan "accuses them before our God day and night." We find this concept in the Book of Job where Satan brings the accusation that Job only worships God because God blesses him.

These are ways Satan seeks to bring division between us and God – either trying to convince God that we are not worthy of His love, or by seeking to convince us that we are not worthy of God's mercy and grace. The good news is that these accusations are baseless and false. God does not heed them, ***and we need to remember that God is for us, and therefore, nothing can stand against us***, even these accusations!

6. CREATING CONFLICT – Pride and Jealousy

One method Satan and the demons use seems to make us either ***think too highly of ourselves*** – which leads to pride – or ***focus too much on others and what they have*** – leading to jealousy. 1 Timothy 3:6-7 is a reminder ... of how new believers can be easily puffed up with pride, with this being a trap of Satan. These verses also point out how one's reputation among people can become a trap of Satan as well. James talks about "*demonic wisdom*" in his discussion of jealousy and selfish ambition that leads to quarrels (James 3:15).

Pride and jealousy also seem to be at work in Cain, who was of the evil one according to 1 John 3:12; these things led to the murder of his brother. These tactics are also found in the Old Testament, as Satan incited David through pride to take a census (1 Chronicles 21:1); and Saul is both jealous of David and said to have an evil spirit at work (1 Samuel 18:10; 19:2).

7. ATTACKING WHEN COMPROMISED – Seizing Opportunities to Present

It is not just what Satan does, but also when he does them. A number of situations are noted that present special opportunities for the attacks of Satan. One is anger, as when we linger in anger, thoughts and options that are not honoring to God present themselves and can seem attractive – we thus are vulnerable to Satan's device.

Another situation in which we leave ourselves vulnerable to Satan's attack is when there is disunity in marriage regarding sexual relations or a lack of intimacy in marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:5).

Another is when there is a lack of forgiveness and desire for vengeance after being hurt ... or when someone sins, as we see from a situation in which a person who has sinned continued to be punished by the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). This might also be a situation in which someone becomes isolated and thus susceptible to Satan's attacks and temptation. Satan also sought to tempt Jesus when He was isolated and hungry in the wilderness, so those are also likely methods he still utilizes today!

8. USING OTHER ENEMIES – Flesh and the World

We also need to recognize that Satan and the demons utilize the other two enemies that we face: the flesh and the world. The world system is one that is designed to oppose the things of God, and we read that this system of the world is under Satan's power (1 John 5:19).

We also sin because of our own desires (James 1:14-15), with Satan likely recognizing that and placing things in our way that will draw us away due to our own sinful tendencies. Above all, we know that Satan and his demons will use anything they possibly can to try to oppose God and thus attack His people. We need to be aware of that!

We know we have an enemy who is strong and highly organized – explaining his effectiveness – who wants to devour us (1 Peter 5:8); at the same time, we know that in Christ, he has and will be defeated. We need to remember that we have the resources in Christ to overcome temptations, that the One we have in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

HAVING LAID THE BASIC FOUNDATION REGARDING THE REALITY OF SATAN AND THE REALITY OF DEMONS ... **THAT "THEY LIVE"** ...

LET US NOW CONSIDER DEMONIC INFLUENCES AND MENTAL DISORDERS ...