

HAMARTIOLOGY (28)

Enemy #2 - The believer is in war with the flesh.

We have a dark side that is an enemy of our godly side, which is our fleshly sin nature. This nature is characterized by ungodly lusts and attitudes (i.e. **I John 2:16**) and is at constant war with our godly nature (**Romans 7:25**).

As long as we are in this mortal body, our flesh will be in constant conflict with God's Spirit that lives in us. It is from our flesh that evil thoughts, desires, and actions arise (**James 1:13-14**).

It is only as one yields to the Spirit of God that victory will occur. The consistency of a Spirit-controlled life is the key to rare moments of victory for the flesh. By focusing our minds on the things of God and by yielding to the Spirit of God, a victorious spiritual life can be lived even though we have our flesh (**Romans 8:1-15**). The Apostle Paul said it simply and succinctly when he said, "But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (**Galatians 5:16**).

Enemy #3 - The believer is in war with Satan.

The Bible makes it clear that Satan is continually stalking the believer (**I Peter 5:8**). He is a crafty, subtle, and dangerous enemy who can and will strike out at believers from many angles. He will lash out from several directions - sickness, loss of a loved one, or great financial calamity, as revealed in the book of Job. He may pit one believer against another in some egotistical, pride issue. He may use lusts, education, philosophy, or any other worldly tactic to draw the believer away from a path which is righteous, true, and sound. He is not to be ignored for he will not just go away. Paul believed Satan's ways were to be clearly seen and understood (**II Corinthians 2:11**). Satan has split churches, destroyed churches, ruined relationships, and demolished lives. He is a fierce enemy who is in constant war with us.

We do have armor which is able to defeat him (**Ephesians 6:13-18**). We do have someone in us who is always greater than the one attacking us (**I John 4:4**). We are to resist him and he will flee from us (**James 4:7; I Peter 5:8-9**).

Satan will use the world and the flesh in an attempt to influence the believer. He is wise and powerful; and anyone who takes him lightly is foolish, and it is no wonder so many believers are being defeated by him.

QUESTION #16 – Is it possible for Satan to actually possess a believer?

Our contemporary issue of theology that has just recently given, rise to a variety of theological notions is understanding the mechanics of an actual satanic attack against the believer. To state the matter clearly - when Satan attempts to devour a believer, does he have the ability to enter the believer in order to carry out his attack? Another way to ask this question is whether or not Satan can attack the believer from without, from within, or both. Is it possible in any satanic attack for Satan to actually possess a believer?

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Those who claim Satan or his forces can enter a believer in order to carry out his assault usually conclude that when the believer fails, it is not just the believer who is responsible for his sin, but Satan is responsible. The old comedic Flip Wilson adage “the Devil made me do it” is very applicable to those who think this way.

The matter of whether or not Satan may possess a believer must be solved by a study of the Bible. Personal experiences, subjective opinions, and counseling psycho-babble must never become the authority for what we believe. **Our authority for understanding what is true must always and forever be the written Word of God.**

When we turn to the Word of God, we discover that prior to our salvation, Satan had a tremendous hold on us. He apparently did have access to our minds and was able to blind them from truth (**II Corinthians 4:3-4**). Furthermore, we learn that prior to salvation, there was a satanic spirit working “in” us (**Ephesians 2:1-2**).

At the moment of our salvation everything changed. When we believed on Christ, we were completely delivered from the satanic world and were sealed with the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:30**). This sealing instantly means we are God’s property forever, not Satan’s property. We also know that at the moment of our salvation we were delivered “from” the domain of darkness (**Colossian 1:13**). This preposition “from” means we were literally delivered “out of” the domain of darkness at the moment of our salvation. Plus we know that even the most carnal of believers are still the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (**I Corinthians 6:19**). Once one has God’s Spirit in him, he cannot ever have a satanic spirit in him. In fact, that is clearly the point of the Apostle John in **I John 4:4**. John is comparing what is “in” the believer as opposed to what is “in” the world. Specifically this means a believer has God’s Spirit in him as opposed to one in the world who has the spirit of the evil one in him.

A critical verse in understanding this entire issue is found in **James 4:7**. It is here that we get God’s revelation concerning satanic attack. **The key to solving this matter is found in the preposition “from” - “resist the devil and he will flee ‘from’ you.”**

In Greek there are two main prepositions that may be translated “from.” One of them “ek” specifically carries with it the idea of taking something out from within. The other “apo” means to take something from some place in the sense of removing it from the edge, not from within (Dana & Mantey, *Greek Grammar*, p. 101ff).

Let me illustrate this. If a person says, “I just came from the mall,” he may mean that he was in the mall and just came out of it; or he may mean he was in the mall parking lot alongside the buildings, but not in them and just came from that location. In Greek the preposition “ek” would indicate the former, and the preposition “apo” would indicate the latter.

When we examine **James 4:7**, the preposition used in regard to Satan and the believer is “apo.” In other words, Satan is not inside the believer, but he tempts from without. James is very clear to point out that when a believer sins, he is carried away by his own lusts (**James 1:14-15**).

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The believer cannot blame God, nor Satan, but only himself. Every believer who sins volitionally closes to sin. Satan will tempt the believer by appealing to his fleshly nature. If the believer yields to the temptation, Satan will keep hammering at the flesh until the believer resists and then he will flee. Never is Satan or his demons permitted by God to enter a believer.

Furthermore, if we consider **Hebrews 4:14-15**, we see that Christ was tempted in “all things” like we are. Never would a demon be able to enter Jesus Christ. If we compare the temptation of Adam and Even in Eden (**Genesis 3**), with the temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness (**Matthew 4**), we may certainly see that the temptation is from without, not within.

If a believer were to persist in yielding to the flesh, God would ultimately take the believer home. But God will never allow His property to be invaded by Satan and his demonic forces. Satan can attack from without, but he cannot ever attack from within.

One passage that gives us a good glimpse of a satanic attack against the believer is **Acts 5:3**. In this text, it is stated that “Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.” It is quite evident that Ananias and Sapphira were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and it was ultimately this reality that led to their immediate execution. If they had lied to anyone else, they would not have been executed; but the fact that they lied to the Holy Spirit, which indwelt them and the church, led to their immediate execution by God.

What needs to be pointed out grammatically are the infinitives “to lie” and “to keep.” Both of these are in the middle voice in Greek. In other words, Ananias lied, **in and of himself**, something that is specifically stated in **verse 4**. Satan was not responsible for the lie and for keeping the money. Ananias was solely responsible for the action, in and of himself.

The matter may be theologically and grammatically understood in this way - Satan came alongside of Ananias and Sapphira and made some of the money look good to them. The lure was the money. The money appealed to the fleshly heart of Ananias and Sapphira and they decided, **in and of themselves (middle voice)**, that they would steal some of it. Satan could only present the idea to them through the lure of money; but it was their own fleshly heart that made the decision, and they both paid the consequences for that decision.

No New Testament believer will ever be able to blame Satan for his or her failure. Satan can only appeal to the flesh-nature of a believer; he cannot and does not have access into the believer. Satan will use the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life to try and get a believer off a righteous path. When a believer chooses to yield to the lure, he becomes spiritually weaker and weaker; and if he reaches an ultimate level in which he is bearing no fruit, God will take him home (**John 15:2**). The believer who sins and then confesses it, which literally means to say precisely the same thing about the sin that God says in His Word and does what God says in His Word, will discover that Satan will flee.

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When the believer faces Jesus Christ, he will gain or lose rewards based upon how he lived his life as a believer (**I Corinthian 3:13-15**). No rewards will be lost because of Satan; they will be lost because of each believer's own choices. The reason why such a judgment can take place is because when one comes to faith in Jesus Christ, he becomes God's property forever, which means he receives God's Spirit, which means no longer does Satan have any claim on the believer. The believer is a new creation in Jesus Christ (**II Corinthians 5:17**). The believer is complete in Jesus Christ (**Colossians 2:10**). The believer is completely forgiven of all sins (**Colossians 2:13**). God's property cannot ever be indwelt for one moment by a demon, and it is this very doctrine that means every believer is responsible and accountable to Jesus Christ. Satan can only present a lure; he cannot enter us. He cannot control us and we cannot blame him.

When we sin we choose to sin. It is our call and we are accountable in and of ourselves just like Ananias and Sapphira. Satan is in the world, but he is not in the believer. We are at war with Satan, but Satan aims his war at our flesh. When we resist him he flees. When we yield to him, he keeps hammering, trying to lure the flesh to get deeper and deeper into sin.

No believer will **ever** be able to blame Satan for his sin, just as James says: "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust" (**James 1:14**).

QUESTION #17 – Are there penalties for sin?

The obvious answer to this question is yes!

There is no question that the motivation and the purposes for punishments from God are completely different for an unbeliever as opposed to a believer. But the truth is, there are penalties for sin.

(Penalty #1) - The penalty for sin in the case of an unbeliever includes temporal disasters and eternal damnation. **II Thessalonians 1:8-9; Revelation 20:15**

Temporal disasters would include all natural consequences that are associated with sin. For example, drunkenness can cost a man his career. AIDS can cost a man his health and life. Crime can cost a man his freedom. These are temporal and natural consequences of the sin.

This penalty is the easiest to cope with because in some of these cases it is possible to make amends and to have the penalty removed. However, eternal damnation is a final penalty, an eternal penalty which cannot be reversed. Temporal disasters as a penalty for sin are nothing compared to eternal damnation.

Sometimes an unbeliever, in evaluating the temporal negatives of his or her life which often are the results of sin, will say something to this effect - "My life is hell on earth." This statement, although emotional, is not factual. Truth is, nothing temporal can even begin to compare with eternal damnation, which is the ultimate punishment of God against those who reject His Son.

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Those without Christ are in a miserable and perilous position. Not only will they experience the temporal and natural negative consequences and penalties for their own sin in this life, but they will forever experience the flames of hell in eternal damnation.

(Penalty #2) - The penalty for sin in the case of a believer includes temporal disasters and the loss of rewards.

When God issues a penalty against a believer in this life, His motive is not destructive, as in the case of the unbeliever; it is corrective (**Hebrews 12:5-13**).

Even though it is possible for a believer to suffer all of the natural consequences of a sin, no believer will ever suffer eternal damnation. **A believer may lose eternal rewards, but he cannot lose eternal salvation!** Even when the believer is in his darkest sin, he is still a child of God who will not ever experience the condemnatory wrath of God (**Romans 8:1; John 3:36**).

There is no doubt that God does give chastising penalties to His people who persist in sin and refuse to take hold of His grace and mercy found through confession. The following list includes some of the penalties God will give to a sinning believer:

1. There will be a loss of fellowship with God. **I John 1:3, 6-7**
2. There will be a loss of joy. **I John 1:4**
3. There will be a loss of fellowship with other believers. **I John 1:7**
4. There will be a loss of a sense of security. **I John 2:5; 5:13**
5. There will be a loss of confidence in prayer. **I John 3:19-22**
6. There will be a loss of confidence at the thought of Christ's return. **I John 2:28**
7. There will be an overwhelming feeling of shame. **I Peter 4:15-16**
8. There may be private, plural, or public rebuke from other believers. **Matthew 18:15-16**
9. There may be public excommunication from the church. **Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:7; Romans 16:17; II Thessalonians 3:14**
The real meaning of Biblical excommunication is a severance of fellowship, not membership.
10. There can be many negative circumstances orchestrated by God. **Hebrews 12:11**
11. There can be a loss of spiritual strength. **I Corinthians 11:30a**
12. There may be a loss of physical health. **I Corinthians 11:30b**
13. There may be a loss of physical life. **I Corinthians 11:30c; I John 5:16**
There are sins that will provoke God to physically execute His own child. When this happens, God has taken the ultimate disciplinary action to insure that this rebellious child can no longer be a reproach to Him.
14. There can be a loss of eternal rewards. **I Corinthians 3:14-15; 9:18, 24-27**
15. There can be a loss of permitted spiritual growth. **Hebrews 5:14 - 6:3; I Corinthians 3:1**

Sin is very serious in the mind of God. For the unbeliever, there is no positive hope. For the believer, there may be many negatives, but there is always hope, for the believer is guaranteed everlasting life.