

HOW DOES SATAN WORK TODAY?

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Christians have an enemy who opposes the mission of Christ and wants our souls in hell (Matt. 13:39, Rev. 12:16-17). Satan's name is a Hebrew word and means "adversary, one who opposes another in purpose or act" (Thayer). The word is used 14 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we find the name "Satan" 33 times and the title "Devil" 32 times. Peter describes him as "your adversary the devil" and likens him to a "roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8). [All Scripture references are from the **English Standard Version** unless otherwise stated.] Paul describes him as the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus said he was the "ruler of this world" (John 14:30) and was tempted by him (Matt. 4:1-11). Jesus describes Satan's character as being "a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he lies he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). This lecture will focus on how Satan works today based upon three passages in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. It will be observed that Satan works by hindering Christian service (1 Thess. 2:18), tempting Christians to sin so that their faith is shaken (1 Thess. 3:5), and finally, deceiving the world and Christians through falsehoods and lies (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

SATAN HINDERS - 1 THESSALONIANS 2:18

Paul and his fellow workers had a great desire to visit the church at Thessalonica. Yet, he writes, "we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us." (1 Thess. 2:18). "The Greek literally says that Satan has stopped them 'once and twice.' The Greek verb translated 'hindered' (enekopsen), was a verb

used to describe a cut in the road, making the road impassable” (Edwards 62).

Commentators speculate on how Satan was able to stop Paul’s visits, but no one truly knows. It may have been through the politarchs at Thessalonica, illness, sufficient trouble elsewhere, or opposition of the Jews in Corinth (Edwards 62, Hendricksen 75).

This passage demonstrates that Satan exerts a “powerful influence over the affairs of men, especially when they endeavor to promote the interests of the kingdom of God” (Hendricksen 76). Satan’s hindering of Paul affected the work of Christ at Thessalonica and his physical travel plans. Clearly we see that Satan desires to hinder the work of Christian servants. He seeks to cut off the path to success of new ministries that make an impact. He seeks to divert the attention of a growing church from an outward focus to inward conflict and strife. Satan seeks to hinder a preacher or missionary by putting up roadblocks and discouraging him in his work.

Satan hinders kingdom work today through the political powers of government. Government is often pushing and legislating Satan’s agenda, as we have seen with homosexual marriage and abortion. Satan hinders the local church with families being so busy with secular activities and events that the church is relegated to a small part of their lives. Satan hinders the church through greed and selfishness, which keeps brethren from giving to Christ. The church is hindered by the lack of volunteers and a pervasive attitude of apathy. Satan has hindered the church by destroying marriages and diverting parents from teaching their children to love God. Satan hinders Christians by getting them focused on earthly security and safety rather than trust in God (Matt. 6:25-33).

SATAN TEMPTS - 1 THESSALONIANS 3:5

Since Paul was hindered from physically visiting the brethren, he planned to send Timothy to the church to get a report of their welfare (1 Thess. 3:5-6) Paul says, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain” (1 Thess. 3:5). Paul feared that Satan had been successful in his tempting and trying the brethren. He knew Satan was attacking their faith and was concerned that with his lack of encouragement and teaching they would succumb. Had the schemes of Satan worked their souls would be lost, and Paul’s work would have been in vain.

One of Satan’s primary methods of attack is through temptation, he even tempted Jesus (Mat. 4:1-11). He began his work against God’s creation with cunning temptation in the garden (Gen. 3). Satan uses our own desires and entices us to sin. When this desire is acted upon it “gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). Jesus tells Peter that Satan has “demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). Jesus’ words seem to describe what Paul feared Satan had done to the Christians at Thessalonica. Satan uses the “desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life” to tempt us to sin (1 John 2:16). To the church at Smyrna Jesus said that the “devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested [*same Greek verb used in 1 Thess. 3:5 - JK*] for ten days you will have tribulation.”

Satan certainly is involved in tempting and testing Christians today. He wants to shake our faith right out of us. He uses various lures from his tackle box to entice our desires and get us to sin. Satan uses ancient temptations like drunkenness and sexual immorality. He even dresses these ancient temptations in new ways like binge drinking,

internet pornography, and sexting. The music and TV entertainment industry work as key agents in Satan's war against Christians. Sadly, many Christians invite sin into their homes regularly, laugh at filth, and support unrighteousness. He has made the American pastime shopping and spending money, because we believe that stuff can make us happy. Greed is epidemic amongst Christians, yet when have you known someone to confess greed and repent of it (Acts 5:1-11)? He will use people close to us to give us bad advice and counsel (Mat. 16:23, Job's 3 friends). His foundational scheme is always to appeal to the pride of man (1 Tim. 3:6). All of these and so many more describe how Satan is tempting man today.

SATAN DECEIVES - 2 THESSALONIANS 2:9-10

In the context of 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul is discussing the man of lawlessness (2:1-11). Paul writes, "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess. 2:9-10). Satan is described here as working through deception and lies. He gains followers who "are already on a course that leads to eternal destruction" (Edwards 287). The people who "refused to love the truth and so be saved" have been duped by Satan and are going deeper into his deception (2 Thess. 2:10).

Jesus says that there is "no truth in him" and he is the "father of lies" (John 8:44). He began his work with God's children through deception (Gen. 3). John called him the "deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). He tempts a person into sin often through deception, then he will accuse them of sin before God (Rev. 12:10). But through the blood of the Lamb, Christians have conquered and can no longer be accused of sin

(Rev. 12:11). Thus, Satan, who knows he has a short time and knows his ultimate doom, makes war upon God's children (Rev. 12:17). John in his great vision described Satan's work as "The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon poured from his mouth." It seems that John is describing Satan's deception that the world has drunk and fully imbibed. Christians have the truth and can distinguish between truth and error only by abiding in the word (John 8:31-32).

The Bible is filled with warnings against false teaching and false teachers. Jesus warned against false teachers (Matt. 7:15). Paul combated false teachers throughout his ministry (2 Cor. 11:13, 26; Galatians 5:1-15) The books of 2 Peter and Jude address the rise of false teachers in the church. Jesus rebuked the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira because they were accepting false teachers within their midst (Rev. 2:12-29). Satan's deception has led to thousands of churches teaching a myriad of doctrines and commandments about worship and salvation. The religious division in our world creates such confusion making it easy for an unbeliever to be callous, skeptical, and cynical of Christianity.

Satan has deceived many by removing shame for sin from our culture and making it the norm and accepted behavior. Satan tells Christians personal lies about their self-worth, value, and salvation. He uses guilt, bitterness, and resentment of the past to shape our present and future. Satan deceives Christians regarding evangelism convincing us that the world is not interested in the gospel or we do not have the ability to share it. With Satan's power of deception and ruling in this world it is no wonder our

Lord prayed before his betrayal, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

CONCLUSION

Paul teaches us in these letters to the Thessalonians that Satan works through hindering, tempting, and deceiving. The church today must wake up to his workings and see him as a personal opponent who is leading many souls to hell's fire. We must consider how Satan is working through these three means in our individual lives and local churches.

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