

Urban Legends 2

The Devil Made Me Do It

We're going to do a little age test here. We're going to see how old you really are. I want to show you clip. If you remember this guy, you're getting up there. This is Reverend Leroy, pastor of the Church of What's Happening Now talking to Geraldine Jones.

Flip Wilson on The Ed Sullivan Show (YouTube) 3 minutes

In pop culture, certain phrases catch on. In the early 70's it was Flip Wilson who popularized the slogan, "The devil made me do it." The whole country was saying it. You saw it on everything from T shirts to bumper stickers.

Unfortunately, it seemed like a lot of people back then, and continuing on until today, have adopted that "the devil made me do it" mantra and actually believe it's true. At least they act like they believe it's true. It's a good excuse.

But the question for us this morning is, does it hold up under scrutiny? Does Satan exist? If he does, how powerful is he? And if he has power, can he make us do anything?

We're in week 5 of a series we're calling "Urban Legends." Actually this is "Urban Legends 2."

Back in 2007 we did "Urban Legends 1" and we analyzed myths like, Faith Can Fix Anything, Following God Brings Good Luck, Difficulties Mean That God's Punishing Me, It's Always Wrong To Judge, Death Always Leads To A Better Place.

Those are all available at the church web site or podcasts on iTunes. But today we want unmask the spiritual urban legend The Devil Made Me Do It.

Let's begin by confirming that...

I. Satan Really Does Exist And He's Powerful

The Bible refers to Satan 49 times and "the devil" 32 times. It's obvious that if

we're going to take the Bible for what it says that Satan is not just a personification of evil but a real spiritual being.

Turn to I Peter chapter 5 page 1191

I Peter 5:8 is just one example of the Bible's clear declaration that Satan is a being.

Read verse 8

Here's a plain, straightforward warning about the nature and the goals of Satan.

Even a casual acquaintance with the Bible reveals that Satan is much more than a force or an influence.

He's a person. He speaks, he plans, he deceives, he hates, he fights. In other words, he carries out the functions of a person.

He's described with personal pronouns in the Bible. He's not called an "it" or a "thing" as if there was anything impersonal about him, but rather he's the "evil one."

The Bible says, Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)

That alone shows us that Satan is a moral creature, responsible to God for his actions.

Satan has the 3 aspects of personality - emotions, intellect and will, and therefore he's actually a person.

Jesus believed that Satan was a reality because He spoke with him directly. Three times in Matthew 4 Satan came to Jesus to tempt him and they met face to face.

The New Testament writers, James, Peter, and Paul all spoke of Satan as a very real individual.

From what we can tell in the Bible, apparently the devil was once an angel. Colossians 1:16 says, For by Him (Jesus) all things were created that are in

heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

That means that Satan, as all other angels, was a creation of God.

According to Ezekiel 28, and Isaiah 14 Satan's original name was Lucifer, which means "light bearer." He was called the "Son of the Morning" and appears to have been the highest in rank of the angelic beings.

But Lucifer wasn't satisfied with being subordinate to his Creator. He wanted to sit on God's throne. He wanted to be the center of power throughout the universe.

The Bible says, How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:12-14)

God, of course, put down this rebellion. But not until 1/3 of the angels had joined Lucifer. They were cast out of heaven and as a result of their fall are waiting for judgment.

God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. (II Peter 2:4)

Because of God's judgment Lucifer "the light bearer" became the devil, Satan, the serpent. Each of those names highlights a particular aspect of his character. The Greek word translated "devil", diabolos, means "an accuser" or a "slanderer."

It comes from the verb diabollo which means to "throw through or at." And so he hurls accusations and slanders at God's people. Revelation calls him "the accuser of the brethren."

The name "Satan" comes from the Hebrew noun satan which means "an adversary, one who opposes."

The name "Serpent" in the Scriptures is used with the concepts of wisdom and

craftiness. And so Satan is called by the Apostle John, “that old serpent, the devil.”

Here's other names that are ascribed to this fallen angel that give us clues into his identity.

In Ephesians 2:2 Paul calls him “the prince of the power of the air.” Even though Satan was cast out of the 3rd heaven, or paradise, he still exercises power in the atmosphere and the stellar heavens.

He's also called “the prince of the world” (John 12:31) which lets us know that Satan claims the throne of this world.

Now listen to this, We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (I John 5:19) Satan's real. Satan's powerful. And this world is his stomping ground.

He's even referred to as “the god of this world” in II Corinthians 4:4. That's because he claims and accepts the worship of this world.

Satan is a personal, angelic being who is very real and very active in our world.

From everything we see in the Bible it's apparent that Satan's program for this age is to destroy all that is God's.

As one man put it, basically Satan's said to God “OK, if I can't have all then You can't either. If I can't have worship and a throne and all that I want then I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure You don't either.

And so Satan, the adversary, has committed himself to using all of his resources to destroy and bring confusion into God's program.

I. Satan Really Does Exist And He's Powerful

II. For All His Power, Satan Has Limitations

Turn to I John chapter 4 page 1197

Satan is the commanding officer and his troops are demons. One of their main goals is to spread spiritual disinformation.

Read verse 1

That means don't believe everything you read and hear outside of the Bible.

Read verses 2 & 3

The main area of attack is always the person of Jesus Christ. Satan's goal is spiritual confusion and ground zero for his attack is, who is Jesus Christ.

The Bible clearly presents a man named Jesus, who is the Christ, who was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. The unique thing about this historical figure is the fact that He fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy for Israel's Messiah down to the letter.

Here's the fundamental teaching of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments: God was to appear on our planet in the flesh. He was to be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, be falsely accused, and then die for our sins on a cross and be raised from the dead three days later.

I John 4 is telling us that when anyone comes to us with any religious message, the first thing we want to know is their Christology. If it doesn't line up with the Bible then its source isn't from God.

If you feel like you're not able to really spiritually evaluate, here's some encouragement.

Read verse 4

The Bible says, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:3,4)

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13)

When we realize our own personal sin and put our trust in Christ as Savior we're sealed with the Holy Spirit. In fact, God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside us.

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (I Corinthians 6:19)

God lives in us and He's greater than the god of this world.

The theologians divide God's attributes into 2 categories, communicable and incommunicable.

Communicable attributes are characteristics of God that can be communicated to His creation. They would include Spirituality, Knowledge, Wisdom, Truthfulness, Holiness, Love, and Mercy.

But those incommunicable attributes are things like Self-existence, Sovereignty, Immutability (unchangeableness), Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience.

Only God has those characteristics. That means that it's the consummate understatement to say "greater is He that is in you."

Satan may be cunning and powerful but he's not all knowing and he's not all powerful. I would believe that Satan can't read our minds. He's not omniscient.

You say, "It sure seems like he knows what I'm thinking." I believe it just looks that way to us. The truth is, we're so predictable he just watches for a while and he's got us figured out.

I. Satan Really Does Exist And He's Powerful

II. For All His Power, Satan Has Limitations

III. If We Don't Understand Satan's Limitations We Miss God's Blessing

If you believe a non-spiritual urban legend, like Bigfoot or the Hoboken Monkeyman really exist, it's probably not going to impact your life. But if you buy into a spiritual urban legend you're going to totally miss out on something that God has for your life.

If we believe that the devil is so powerful that he can get into our minds or draw us kicking and screaming into some place we shouldn't be, we're ignoring what God wants to do in our life.

If we believe that the devil can make us do things then we'll use that as an excuse to not do what God wants us to do.

Turn to Ephesians 6 page 1150

Satan hates God with all that's in him and his number 1 priority is to rob God of the worship that He alone deserves.

His goal is basically two-fold. Satan's goal for a person who doesn't know God personally found in II Corinthians 4:4. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

He wants people to trust in their own morality, their own religion, their own system of ethics. Satan doesn't oppose religion just as long as people trust something other than Jesus Christ for their forgiveness.

Satan's second goal is to attack those who have already trusted Christ as savior. If he can't keep us from salvation he's going to do everything in his power to try to keep us from being fruitful. The Devil, with all his craft and trickery attacks you and me. He hates God so obviously he hates God's people.

Read verses 10-13

Notice what we're to stand against in verse 11. We're to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The word "wiles" is a translation of the Greek noun *methodeia*. You don't have to be a Greek scholar to figure out that *methodeia* is the basis for our English word "method."

The word actually means "deceit, craft, trickery." In Ephesians 4:14 it's translated "plotting."

Most of us here today are not going to have our biggest problems with Satan's most obvious enticements. It's his subtleties that have the greatest chance of bringing us down.

II Corinthians chapter 11 says that Satan is transformed into an angel of light and his ministers are too.

He doesn't have a tail, two horns, a red suit and a pitchfork. He doesn't come showing you sin in all its horror and ugliness.

He works to pull us down inch by inch so slowly and so carefully and so precisely that we don't even know what's happening.

He appeals to our intellect with false doctrine that undermines our confidence in God.

He appeals to our flesh with the pleasures of sin, just a little bit at a time until he's finally got us hooked.

He appeals to our pride by causing division among Christians. Satan tries to rip us apart and bring friction and factions into the church all the while making us think that we're justified in what we do.

He hinders our service to God by pointing us to so many other things that the days go by and we don't have time for God.

He causes us to trust in ourselves by appealing to our ego and we gradually slip downward because we fail to rest totally in God's provision of strength.

He appeals to the lust of the eyes by pushing us into a materialistic, affluent, self-indulgent, self-satisfied world in which we become so overcome with "things" that aren't sin in and of themselves but that dilute and water down our spiritual commitment.

Satan is no fool. He's had thousands of years of practice with people and he knows exactly what works best. He and his demonic assistants are formidable enemies because they know you and me. They know what makes us tick. And they are masters at coming totally unnoticed and hitting you and me at our weakest spots.

Could it be that even though we give mental assent to the fact that Satan exists that too often we live as if he really wasn't there?

No wonder Peter warned us to be vigilant.

So where are God's blessings? If Satan's such a deceiver do we really stand a chance against him?

Look at this... Read verses 14-17

Here's what God has provided for us. Truth, righteous, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and prayer. That's the armor of God.

If we think the devil's more powerful than he is, we're robbing God of the glory.

God's provided us with the Holy Spirit who's greater.

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (I John 4:4) He's infinitely greater.

He's provided us with an escape route from temptation.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (I Corinthians 10:13)

He's provided us with a guaranteed win in the end.

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:20)

We know the end of the story. We know how it all comes down.

If we say, "The Devil Made Me Do It" we're actually just excusing ourselves from taking responsibility for our own actions.

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IV. We Use Spiritual Weapons To Fight Spiritual Battles

When the Navy Seals went into Osama bin Laden's lair they used appropriate weapons. When we deal with Satan we need we need to use the right weapons.

II Corinthians 10:4 explains that our weapons aren't physical. Ephesians 6 tells us that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood.

We have an enemy. The Bible tells us about the works of Satan:

He's the author of sin and temps us to sin
He lays snares for us
He snatches the Word of God out of hearts
He blinds minds
He harasses believers and accuses them before God
He sows tares among God's people
He resists God's servants
He hinders God's people

I mean, he's a foe with an agenda. The Ephesians 6 passage gives us the armor but it only lists one offensive weapon. It's the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Turn now to Matthew chapter 4 page 947

Before the Son of Man, Jesus, could carry out a physical ministry here on earth He had to be tempted and come up sinless. We're tempted so He had to be tempted.

He's going to face three specific temptations from Satan that really cover all the avenues of temptation we face. Satan is going to appeal to the desires of the body, the desires of the mind, and the pride of life.

I want you to take careful note of how Jesus deals with each appeal.

Read verses 1-11

In each case Jesus used what was written in the Bible to defuse the temptation. The sword of the Spirit is the Bible. It's alive, it's powerful, and you can always trust it.

Popular books and movies present a lot of hocus pocus when it comes to dealing with the devil. There's people going through rituals, reading in Latin, and sprinkling holy water.

You'll never read about any of those things in the Bible. We just need to use what's written and use it correctly.

Satan's oppression is powerful, Jesus Christ is more powerful. He's our deliverer. He's our deliverer, and He's our Savior. He said, He that believes on me has everlasting life. (John 6:47)

Here's where real deliverance comes from. In Jesus Christ is salvation and freedom and life.

As we believe in Him our lives are cleansed. As we obey God's Word we're filled with the strength we need to stay in the middle of God's blessing.

Do you want victory over Satan and his deceptions? Then don't really focus on Satan at all! Be aware of him, but focus on Jesus Christ instead. Fill your life with God's truth and then obey what you know.

Flip Wilson used to say "The Devil made me do it" and people across our country quoted him and said, "Sounds good to me."

The Devil is real but the Devil's defeated. He can't make you do anything. But he can sure influence you if you listen to him. So who are you listening to today?

Are you for Jesus, or against Him? Maybe you thought you were just staying neutral. Remember, there's no such thing as spiritual neutrality. Jesus Christ defeated him who had the power of death at the cross. He died for our sins and rose again.

Trust Him today. Don't oppose Him and what He wants to do in your life. Follow out the Biblical command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31)

Then live in His power and enjoy your freedom.