

The Liar and Father of Lies (Satan) **(John 8:37-50)**

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Overview of this Section of the Gospel of John

- a. In this section of the gospel of John, Jesus presents His message within the framework of three contrasts:
 - i. Light versus darkness (covered two lessons ago lesson)
 - ii. Freedom versus slavery (covered in the previous lesson)
 - iii. The truth versus lies (we will cover in this lesson)
- b. In this lesson we will look at the third of the three pairs of spiritual opposites: truth versus lies (and Jesus, the One Who always tells the truth; versus Satan, the great liar).

II. Like Father, Like Son (Read John 8:33-50)

- a. (In this lesson we pick up at **John 8:37**; but for the reading we will start in verse **John 8:33**, to capture the flow of the discussion.)
- b. Summary of the running argument between Jesus and the Jews he was speaking with here:
 - i. The Jews begin by saying that *Abraham* is their father. (**John 8:33**)
 - ii. Jesus acknowledges that they are descended from Abraham, but He says they are *not really* Abraham's children. They are *nothing like him!* (**John 8:37-40**)
 - iii. Jesus says that the Jews are acting just like their father. (**John 8:41a**)
 1. The Jews then respond that *God* is their father. (**John 8:41b**)
 2. Jesus says that if God was their Father, they would love Him (Jesus), since He came from God. (**John 8:42**)
 - iv. Jesus tells them that they follow *their father, the devil*, and they want to do just what their father does. They are just like their father, who is:
 1. *A murderer* from the beginning, and
 2. *A liar*, and the father of lies. (**John 8:44**)

- v. Jesus concludes by saying that they do not hear Jesus because they are not of God. He honors His father, but they dishonor Him (Jesus). (**John 8:47-49**)
- c. Jesus says a number of very insulting (but true) things to the Jews He is speaking to here. This is strong medicine. He tells them:
 - i. They are not really Abraham's descendants; they are not like he was.
 - ii. They want to kill him (Jesus); they are murderers.
 - iii. They are liars.
 - iv. They are not able to convict Jesus of any sins.
 - v. They are not of God.
 - vi. They are sons of the devil, who behave just like their "father".
- d. The Jews respond by insulting Jesus:
 - i. They say that He is a Samaritan, and demon-possessed.

III. The Significance of Satan

- a. Few believe in Satan as a living being and take him seriously
 - i. A survey of Christians in the U.S. done by Barna Research (2009) asked the question, "Do you believe in Satan as a living being (not just a symbol of evil)". Only about 40% said "yes". And this survey was limited to people who *identified themselves as Christians!*
 - ii. Just over a week ago was Halloween, a holiday modified from northern European pagan practices. One of my co-workers wanted to go to Salem, which goes crazy at this time of year with all kinds of witchcraft and Satanism celebrations. He didn't take it seriously.
 - iii. Lots of jokes and cartoons about Satan; commonly portrayed as a trouble-maker in red suit with horns and a pitchfork.
- b. Satan's role in suffering and evil we see in the world
 - i. I had a long conversation recently with a woman considering the Christian faith, who was coming from a Tibetan Buddhist background. Her biggest challenge was understanding the reason for so much suffering she saw in the world.
 - ii. She grew up in Tibet, where virtually everyone she knew was Tibetan Buddhist.

- iii. She later went to major city in China for her studies. There, she was exposed to suffering and injustices in a way that she had never before seen. It greatly disturbed her. She was facing a really important question, one that many struggle with: "If God is good and all-powerful, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?" She asked her Buddhist friends back home for an explanation for suffering. Her Tibetan Buddhist friends gave the following explanation: (Note that Buddhism came out of India, and out of Hinduism.)
1. The spirits of people come back in some way, after death. Furthermore, if a person did bad things in his or her prior life, that person will face unpleasant consequences in their current life as a result.
 - a. The Buddhist framework does provide an explanation for suffering. It represented justice, working through punishment, for what you did in a past life.
 - b. Therefore, if a Buddhist sees someone suffering, he could assume that person is simply *facing the consequences of their past transgressions*.
 2. I pointed out to my friend that while this Buddhist explanation may offer a certain internal consistency, it struck me that it also has some rather obvious problems. For example:
 - a. We can see many very good people who are suffering. Consider Jesus and the prophets. Do we assume that they were wicked in past lives? On the other hand, there are many wicked people who have lives of ease and comfort, as pointed out by prophets in the Old Testament (as in **Psalm 37** and **Psalm 73**).
 - b. When someone who believes suffering is just payment for sin in a prior life sees another suffering, what will they think? "They probably did something to deserve it". If all believed that, the result would be a world lacking compassion and empathy for those who are suffering.
 - c. Perhaps this explains why so many of the hospitals and orphanages of the world, etc., were started by *Christians*, who have a very different view on suffering. We believe that God loves and has compassion on those who are suffering; His followers are to be the hands and feet of Jesus to care for those in need. (Consider what

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:44-51** and in **Matthew 25:31-46.**)

3. I explained that the Bible provides the only correct answer to this problem of suffering.
 - a. If it is only God and us, and we are suffering unjustly, then either God is unjust, or God is not all-powerful.
 - b. Satan exists and brings suffering and death to godly people. Evil is real, not an illusion.
 - c. We then looked at the account of **Job** as an illustration.
 - i. Read **Job 1:1-4, 1:6-12** and **2:1-8**
 - ii. Satan tells God: Job loves you and is righteous only because you have protected him and blessed him. However, if you allow me to attack him and bring about suffering in his life, Job will curse you!
 - iii. Satan attacks and assaults *everyone*, including righteous people, bringing about evil and suffering.
 - d. Satan's plan in the West: to make people think that God is the agent behind all the suffering. Then people will blame (and hate) God. Paint God as the "bad guy", the One who wants to ruin your life, the One who wants to take away all enjoyment!
- c. Let's look at how prominent Satan's role is, as revealed in the New Testament.
 - i. Jesus' mission, as described by John: "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (**1 John 3:8**, NKJV)
 - ii. Jesus' words to Paul, in commissioning him to spread the gospel to the world: "I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (**Acts 26:17-18**, NKJV)

- iii. Jesus explains his mission to his opponents, who accuse Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan.
 - 1. “And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.’ Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.’” (Luke 11:14–23, NKJV)
 - a. According to Jesus, Satan has a kingdom of his own (just as Jesus has a kingdom). Satan is ruler over his kingdom of darkness.
 - b. In the illustration (or mini-parable) given by Jesus here:
 - i. Satan is a strong and well-armed man (*I think of Goliath here*) guarding his own palace.
 - ii. Jesus is the stronger man who overcomes Satan, defeats him, and plunders his possessions.
 - iii. **Question:** What are the “goods” in the palace of Satan, which Jesus plans to liberate after defeating Satan?
 - 1. **Answer:** It’s us! We are the former subjects who once were in Satan’s kingdom, but have been rescued by Jesus!
 - iv. **Question:** If Satan is so central to the story of Jesus’ mission, and mentioned prominently throughout the entire New Testament, *why is there so little mention* of Satan when the gospel is preached today?

1. Perhaps this neglect is a reaction to the mischaracterization of Satan (portrayed by many as a mischievous little guy in a little red suit).
2. Satan has blinded people. If he can make people believe he does not exist, then when bad things happen in life, people will believe that *it's God's fault*. Remove Satan, and God will be blamed for all evil and suffering in the world. What a cunning (and effective) strategy!

v. Read **Revelation 12:3-12**

1. Appearance of Satan here (not sure how literal versus figurative the appearance here)
 - a. He does appear fiery red and with horns and a tail (like many representations today), however...
 - b. Referred to as a dragon or serpent; seven heads and ten horns, and powerful tail. Seems like a horrible, large red seven-headed snake. He has his own (evil) angels, and is engaged in war.
2. He is described as "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night." (**Revelation 12:10**, NKJV)
 - a. In **Job 1:6-12** and **2:1-8** we see Satan accusing Job before God. Satan appeared before the throne of God to accuse Job of not truly loving God; Satan said Job would reject God if all the blessings and protections were removed.
 - b. It seems to me from **Revelation 12:10** that Satan is bringing accusations against all of us Christians before the throne of God "day and night"!
 - c. God permits Satan to act within limits. And God uses Satan's wicked intent to refine our faith. Job was blessed abundantly *in the end* for his faithful perseverance.

IV. The Origin and Background of Satan

- a. "Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" (**Luke 10:17-18**, NKJV)
 - i. Jesus said that Satan was in heaven at one point in time and was cast out. He sinned and fell.

- ii. Is there anything written about this in the Scriptures?
- b. **Genesis 3** speaks of Satan (already fallen) in the garden, tempting the woman and the man, lying and bringing death into the world. However, is there anywhere in the Old Testament where it talks about Satan falling from heaven?
- i. Read **Isaiah 14:12-17**
 - 1. Here it speaks of Lucifer, another name for Satan, falling from heaven and being cast down to the earth.
 - 2. It appears that the sin involved pride, a desire to exalt himself and “be like the Most High”.
 - ii. Read **Ezekiel 28:11-19** regarding the “king of Tyre”, which early Christian writers saw as referring to Satan. (Ask yourself as we read this: could this passage be referring to *any* earthly king?)
 - 1. He was (once) in the paradise of God; with the cherub, on the holy mountain of God.
 - 2. He was created blameless, but later sin was found in him.
 - 3. He was “cast down” from the mountain of God.
 - 4. His sin involved pride (“your heart was lifted up”).
 - 5. Ultimately, he will be devoured by fire.
 - iii. Early Christian writers like Origen and Tertullian pointed out that this passage refers to Satan. Origen (c. 185-255 AD), a teacher in the church in Alexandria, Egypt, makes the point that these characteristics could not apply to some earthly, human king.
 - 1. “Seeing, then, that such are the words of the prophet, who is there that on hearing, ‘You were a seal of a similitude, and a crown of beauty among the delights of paradise,’ or that ‘From the day when you were created with the cherubim, I placed you in the holy mount of God,’ can so enfeeble the meaning as to suppose that this language is used of some man or saint, not to say the prince of Tyre? Or what fiery stones can he imagine in the midst of which any man could live? Or who could be supposed to be stainless from the very day of his creation, and wickedness being afterwards discovered in him, it be said of him then that he was cast forth upon the earth?”

2. “For the meaning of this is, that He who was not yet on the earth is said to be cast forth upon it: whose holy places also are said to be polluted. We have shown, then, that what we have quoted regarding the prince of Tyre from the prophet Ezekiel refers to an adverse power, and by it it is most clearly proved that that power was formerly holy and happy; from which state of happiness it fell from the time that iniquity was found in it, and was hurled to the earth, and was not such by nature and creation.
3. “...Again, we are taught as follows by the prophet Isaiah regarding another opposing power. The prophet says, “How is Lucifer, who used to arise in the morning, fallen from heaven! He who assailed all nations is broken and beaten to the ground. You indeed said in your heart, I shall ascend into heaven; above the stars of heaven shall I place my throne; I shall sit upon a lofty mountain, above the lofty mountains which are towards the north; I shall ascend above the clouds; I shall be like the Most High. Now shall you be brought down to the lower world, and to the foundations of the earth. Those who see you shall be amazed at you, and shall say, ‘This is the man who harassed the whole earth, who moved kings, who made the whole world a desert, who destroyed cities, and did not unloose those who were in chains.’ All the kings of the nations have slept in honor, everyone in his own house; but you shall be cast forth on the mountains, accursed with the many dead who have been pierced through with swords, and have descended to the lower world.
4. “....Most evidently by these words is he shown to have fallen from heaven, who formerly was Lucifer, and who used to arise in the morning. For if, as some think, he was a nature of darkness, how is Lucifer said to have existed before? Or how could he arise in the morning, who had in himself nothing of the light? No, even the Savior Himself teaches us, saying of the devil, ‘Behold, I see Satan fallen from heaven like lightning.’ For at one time he was light.”
 - a. (Source: Origen, *De Principiis*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, pp. 258–260)

V. How Can We Overcome in Our Battles Against Satan?

- a. **Question:** Why is it important for us to learn about Satan?

- i. **Answer:** As in any great contest against a mighty adversary (in war, or even in sports) it is important to know your enemy. If you want to defeat a great enemy, you need to know his strengths and weak points. Study those who have defeated him in the past. Know what he is likely to do in battle, in order to be prepared.
- b. Read **Luke 4:1-13**
 - i. Satan is bold, attacking even the Son of God
 1. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (**Hebrews 4:15**, NKJV)
 2. We can learn from how Jesus overcame when tempted/attacked by Satan.
 - ii. Jesus knew and quoted Scripture when He was attacked.
 1. He replied with, “It is written...” then quoted from the word of God.
 2. Like Jesus, we need to read, study and quote Scripture when tempted. We need to be in the word of God every day so that we will be ready, prepared, and armed whenever we are tempted throughout the day: whether by anger, lust, envy, or any other temptation.
 - iii. Note that while Satan lost his battle with Jesus that day, he would come back and try again “at an opportune time”.
 1. Satan will keep trying; if you are victorious today, he will strive to get you when you tomorrow, hoping that you will be weaker. Do not be surprised. Do not let your guard down. Always be ready.
- c. Jesus teaches us how to pray (**Luke 11:1-4**)
 - i. Every day, the daily prayer, Jesus said we should be asking God to “deliver us from the evil one”.
- d. We need to see Satan as a Peter did: as a dangerous, man-eating lion.
 - i. “Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (**1 Peter 5:6-8**, NKJV)

- ii. While we see Satan described as a 7-headed, 10-horned dragon in **Revelation 12**, here Peter compares Satan to *a lion*.
 - iii. Lions are patient, waiting for the right time to attack the weak and isolated stragglers. We need to be humble and remain vigilant. Stay close to strong brothers or sisters, confess your sins and stay in the light!
- e. Another scary thing about Satan: he tries to enter people.
- i. “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve.” (**Luke 22:1-3**, NKJV)
- f. One of the greatest passages in the Bible regarding the spiritual battle we are in, between the forces of light and darkness, is within **Ephesians chapters 4-6**. Note the famous passages about husband/wife (**Ephesians 5:22-33**) and parent/child (**Ephesians 6:1-4**) relationships are *within the context of that discussion*.
- i. Read **Ephesians 4:25-5:31**.
 1. “Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another. “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (**Ephesians 4:25-32**, NKJV)
 2. Satan wants a place in your heart. He will take any space that is available (the 3-bedroom condo, or even the broom closet) from which he can establish a base to expand his operations.
 3. Take inventory of your spiritual life. Don’t give the devil any place at all in your heart: no bitterness, wrath, anger, evil speaking, malice, corrupt words, etc.

4. Paul tells us that dealing with our anger is important to keep Satan out of our hearts. Note that here that when Paul says, “be angry and do not sin”, this is a direct quote from what David said in **Psalm 4**, from the Septuagint (LXX).
 - a. Read **Psalm 4:4-5** (designated **Psalm 4:5-6** in translations based on the LXX)
 - b. It says, “be angry and do not sin”.
 - c. This psalm calls us to reflect on our beds, to take personal inventory; and to have remorse if we have sinned in our hearts. This is a great spiritual practice.
5. Clearly, God wants us to guard against unrighteous anger. But is anger ever acceptable for us? If not, why do David and Paul tell us we can “be angry” but not sin?
 - a. I wondered about how we should best understand this Scripture, when says to “be angry”. Does God really want us to *be angry*? (I have seen great damage done by anger, and certainly am not immune struggling with anger sometimes, myself.)
 - b. I decided to check to see if any early Christian writers commented on this, and found one writer who did.
 - c. Commenting on this passage and issue, Lactantius, a prominent Christian teacher in Rome (c. 250-325 AD) speaking about man’s anger, wrote:
 - i. “He from the beginning had inserted anger in the liver of man,.... Therefore, He does not altogether prohibit anger, because that affection is necessarily given, but He forbids us to persevere in anger. For the anger of mortals ought to be mortal; for if it is lasting, enmity is strengthened to lasting destruction. Then, again, when He enjoined us to be angry, and yet not to sin, it is plain that He did not tear up anger by the roots, but restrained it, that in every correction we might preserve moderation and justice. Therefore, He who commands us to be angry is manifestly Himself angry; He who enjoins us to be quickly appeased is manifestly Himself easy to be appeased: for He has enjoined those things

which are just and useful for the interests of society.

- ii. “But because I had said that the anger of God is not for a time only, as is the case with man, who becomes inflamed with an immediate excitement, and on account of his frailty is unable easily to govern himself, we ought to understand that because God is eternal, His anger also remains to eternity; but, on the other hand, that because He is endued with the greatest excellence, He controls His anger, and is not ruled by it, but that He regulates it according to His will. And it is plain that this is not opposed to that which has just been said. For if His anger had been altogether immortal, there would be no place after a fault for satisfaction or kind feeling, though He Himself commands men to be reconciled before the setting of the sun.”

- iii. (Source: Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7, p. 277)

d. What is Lactantius saying here?

- i. Anger is a character of God. God is loving and patient, but He does *get angry*.
 - ii. God did put the capacity for anger into the hearts of man. However, He puts strict limits on human anger. He insists that we must have it under control, and we can only exhibit it for a short period of time. (We cannot let it last beyond the day.)
- ii. Let us consider how Paul concludes this discussion about the spiritual battle that Christians face. Read **Ephesians 6:10-13**.
 - 1. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to

withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”
(**Ephesians 6:10–13**, NKJV)

2. Paul reminds us that our real battle is against Satan and the spiritual forces of evil allied with him. It is not against other people. (Even though most of the world *does not even acknowledge* that Satan exists!)
3. He goes on in the rest of the chapter to discuss the importance of all the essential armor we will need to stand in this battle. He also mentions “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (**Ephesians 6:17**). This is our great offensive weapon, the very same one we saw that Jesus used when tempted by Satan.

VI. Conclusion

- a. We cannot fully appreciate the mission of Jesus, the reason there is so much suffering in the world, or the battle we are facing, unless we understand the role and mission of Satan.
- b. He was a murderer and liar from the beginning, as Jesus told us in **John 8**. He has a vast kingdom of his own, and his own sons.
- c. The better we understand the nature of Satan and his kingdom, the tactics he uses and how others have prevailed against him in the past, the better equipped we will be for our own battles.
- d. Pray each day for God to “deliver us from the evil one”.
- e. Open your eyes to the unseen spiritual battle: to the lion who seeks to devour you, the strong man who wants to take you back. Take inventory of your life each day; do not even give him the smallest foothold in your heart. Our battle is not against flesh and blood.
- f. Follow the wonderful example of Jesus, our Lord and brother, who faced all the same temptations we face. He knew and effectively used the word of God to counter-attack Satan. Be devoted to the word of God every day, and be ready to use it.