

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#62—Angelology—Part III¹
Satan's Strategies²
Paul Karleen
February 15, 2009

The next study will be on the origin, organization and work of fallen angels. Helpful for that and the present study are House, sections 42-45, and Renald Showers book entitled *Those Invisible Spirits Called Angels*.³

As the saying goes, “When you aim at nothing, you are certain to hit it.” In the case of finding God’s will for your life (what is revealed in Scripture) if you don’t aim at it, you are likely to hit something else—the will of Satan. Lest you think that I am inventing something, there is a large amount of biblical information that indicates that Satan has very definite desires for Christians and, if he had his way, all believers would be doing exactly what he wants. Take, for example, Lk. 22:31:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you^a as wheat.

and Eph. 2:1-3:

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.

and 1 Pet. 5:8:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

In the previous study we saw that Satan’s sin consisted of 1) pride in what he was and had and 2) the desire to be like God and be an alternative to him. His strategies flow from these sins: promoting pride in self and alternatives to God’s purposes.

Satan carries these goals out by means of a plan with many parts to it. In a sober assessment of Satan’s work in his life, Paul calls the outworking of these parts ‘schemes’ in 2 Cor. 2:11:

In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes

We should have this same awareness of Satan’s approaches, which we will call strategies. In this study we will see a number of specific satanic moves that we encounter in our spiritual lives. These strategies are the same throughout human history, and can be seen from his deception of Eve in the Garden, his opposition to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, his attacks on believers during this age and his work during the seventieth week of Daniel and after the Millennium.

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² I owe many of the observations in this study to Charles Ryrie.

³ Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1997.

^aThe Greek is plural.

I. Basic elements of Satan's strategy

1. Counterfeiting

Satan's basic strategy is to offer counterfeits, alternatives to God's will. We have a clear statement of this in 2 Thess. 2:9:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,

We know that this fits with his own basic outlook and his sin. He doesn't necessarily offer the believer something that is clearly evil. Often it is something that is not necessarily bad in itself but is less than God's best. An example is the temptation of Christ regarding the kingdoms of this world. Jesus would eventually get them, but Satan wanted him to bypass the suffering of the Cross. He would like you to spend time and energies on good pursuits that take you from God's revealed will for your life.

2. Intervening directly

Satan may work very directly, as in 1 Thess. 2:18:

For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us.

This hindrance may refer to the security or bail that Jason had to guarantee and which involved an agreement that Paul would not return to that city again and become what was perceived as a public nuisance (see Acts 17:9). Paul's description of it indicates that he saw Satan's work as blunt and obvious.

3. Applying pressures

Satan may apply various pressures on the believer—from family, health, or other circumstances—to bring about discouragement, confusion or outright sin. Paul probably viewed Satan's hindrance (1 Thess. 2:18, above) as a pressure.

4. Promoting religiosity

It is obvious from the proliferation of spiritual systems around the world that Satan likes religion. Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with God through a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians become simply religious—as opposed to living in the riches that are in Christ—when they go through spiritual activities by rote and tradition. Looking religious is always popular: many TV figures who attract large audiences by their appearance and personality are current examples. Christians fall into the trap of looking like children of God on the outside, but not having the spiritual life inside to back it up. They may be saved, but they try to fool others with their spirituality. The reality shows up sooner or later. Satan wants a fake exterior. God wants genuine Christlikeness. The most extreme example of this is Satan's establishment of worldwide worship of his beast during the seventieth week of Daniel.

5. Slighting God's grace

God's grace overcomes the rebellion of sinful human beings, but there is no forgiveness for fallen angels, including Satan. He is an opponent of the plan of God, substituting his own. One of his tactics is to lead Christians to neglect their spiritual gifts—which are given as part of God's grace (Eph. 4:7). Certainly he would like us to not know what our gifts are and, if we do know what they are, he would like to keep us from using them. Do you know what your gifts are and use them? What is God's will for you in this? Another

slighting of grace that he would like us to adopt is neglecting worship, which is at heart the acknowledgment that God has applied his grace to our lives.

6. Diverting

Satan's basic strategy of offering counterfeits comes to the fore in his work of directing a person away from God's best for him. Here is Rev. 12:9:

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

We often see Satan's diversion operating at decision points where people are involved with making choices about two known alternatives. One of the clearest in Scripture is the decision point that Lot and Abraham were involved with. Lot chose a route that ultimately damaged his family severely, while Abraham was content with the less glamorous land and showed he was a citizen of a heavenly city. John Mark is another example of making a damaging choice at a decision point—resisting the Apostle Paul and choosing his own course (Acts: 15:36-40). Abraham's lapse of faith as he waited for the fulfillment of the promise of an heir—resulting in the birth of Ishmael—shows clearly Satan's work of presenting side tracks to the course of following God's will. Paul must have had this sidetracking in mind when he wrote in 1 Tim. 5:15 regarding widows who presumably were believers:

Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

Often we follow a person or project instead of Scripture and the Spirit. Think of how many ministries you hear about that are person-centered instead of Scripture- and Christ-centered.

7. Dulling perception

Satan dulls our spiritual perception through the allurements of the world, resulting in failure to bear fruit. Second Tim. 4:3-4 shows the process and outcome of such dulling:

³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

8. Perverting priorities

Satan tempts us to pervert our priorities so that we seek the things of the world first. He tells us that success is doing well in a career or in business and having a big bank account. He tells us that it's foolish to involve ourselves in things that do not have to do with the satisfaction that comes from material possessions. At every point he offers what is the opposite of Phil. 1:-9-10, where the believer is exhorted to put a premium on what really matters:

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

S. Lewis Johnson has said, "Many things are good in themselves. It is not bad to have a lot of money or to do the best you can. But it is possible for a good thing to become evil—when it becomes the main thing in your life."

9. Doubting God's Word

Satan gives evidence of not believing what God has said, especially what he has written in Scripture. When God has predicted Satan's end (Rev. 19:20, etc.), how can he continue to rebel? This inveterate doubt of God's word is a basic part of his personality and strategy. He would dearly love to get us to fail to believe God. After all, he succeeded with Eve in Gen. 3:1:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

He attempted it with our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 4:6, where he was corrected in his misuse of Scripture by Jesus), so why wouldn't he try it with us?

10. Promoting false theology—counterfeits of God's Word

Satan is a theologian. He has a system of spiritual concepts that he believes and promotes in his *cosmos*. We see this in these three passages:

Rev. 2:24: Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets

1 Tim. 4:1: The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

James 3:15: Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

S. Lewis Johnson has pointed out that the books of the cults—the bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Book of Mormon, for example—are expressions of the deep things of Satan.

Satan's teachings are corruptions of Scripture, and he would like us to misinterpret what God has said. Remember that in the Garden he told Eve that God doesn't always mean what he says. Applied to the written Word, this means—according to Satan—that God doesn't always mean what he says.

11. Slighting faith

Satan would like us to live without faith. Faith pleases God. Lack of faith for a Christian means he is trying to take care of himself. Satan likes this, because it is what he does.

12. Coming in camouflage

In 2 Cor. 11:13-14 Paul describes Satan's cover-up strategy:

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

He does not present us with an alternative and say, "Here is a great sin for you to commit!" What he presents looks desirable. Often this takes the form of an outright lie:

Jn. 8:44: You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was

a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Acts 13:10: You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

God, who is benevolent, has revealed Himself over and over in various ways, Satan, malevolent, hides himself. In the light of this, the believer's first line of defense is to know what Scripture says about him. Then, as described in Eph. 6:10ff, 1 Pet. 5:8, and Jas. 4:7, we are to resist or take a firm stand against him. Ephesians 6 in particular provides several additional weapons, from truth to prayer.

13. Re-ordering values

Satan tries to get us to follow his ordering of values, substituting shades of gray for absolutes. Take the virtue of honesty, for example. Suppose you came out of a store to find an armored truck with the doors open, no security guards in sight, no one but you in the parking lot and boxes full of stacks of money in full view. Would you take anything? Almost certainly not. But would you go back to a store after getting home and finding out that you had been given \$5 too much in change? How much money would have to be involved for you to take action? If you think in terms of a scale, maybe you are working with shades of gray.

14. Disappearing

Satan works to get believers to forget his existence and work. When is the last time you heard teaching that explicitly described what his strategies are?

15. Blinding unbelievers

Satan blinds the unsaved to the truth of the Gospel. Here is 2 Cor. 4:4:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

16. Hindering the gospel message

Mark 4:15 shows Satan's direct intervention in the propagation of the Gospel:

Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

17. Tempting to sin

While many of Satan's actions are indirect and covert, sometimes he is very direct and offers temptations to sin, as in Mt. 4:13:

and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Also, 1 Cor. 7:5, regarding relations between husband and wife:

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote

yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

18. Attempting to turn God-sent trials into sinful response on our part

Paul's affliction was ultimately sent by God, but in some way administered by Satan, who was attempting to get Paul to sin:

2 Cor. 12:7: To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

19. Bringing about demonic bondage for the unsaved

There are many examples of this in Scripture. Here is an explicit statement of Satan's involvement in demonic possession:

Lk. 13:16: Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

20. Attempting to dislodge believers from their salvation

As he did in accusing Job, Satan attempts to get God to turn his favor from believers, as seen in Rev. 12:10:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

We will see the wonderful remedy for this in the next section.

II. The Christian's defense against Satan's strategies

1. Be alert to Satan's activity. Try to identify where he might be working against you right now.
2. Keep a balanced view of Satan's work. We should not dwell on him but should be ready to attribute to him situations that may very well be from his hand.
3. Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is engaged in a continuous ministry of praying for you:

Rom. 8:34: Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Heb. 7:25: ²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely^c those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

4. Have a sober-minded attitude toward him, leaving the ultimate battle with God. Here is Jude 9:

But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

5. Be serious and alert, able to resist Satan through faith, as we see in 1 Pet. 5:8-9:

^c Or *forever*

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

6. Utilize God-given spiritual assets, as found, for example, in Eph. 6:10-20, to withstand Satan. Notice that both 1 Pet. 5:9 and the following passage tell us to resist Satan—not go looking for him.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

7. Remember that just as there is a will of God for your life, there is also a will of Satan. Scripture tells us in many places what God's will is. It also tells us what Satan's will is, as we have seen in this study. Use this information to strengthen your walk with God and find and do his will.

Questions for Further Study

1. Identify three situations involving people you have not met (someone in the news, for example) that appear to have involved satanic activity. Connect one or more of the strategies above with each situation.
2. Identify three situations involving people that you do know (friends, relatives, for example) that appear to have involved satanic activity. Connect one or more of the strategies above with each situation.
3. Identify three situations in your own life that appear to have involved satanic activity. Do the connecting.

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiriation* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning 'standard'; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation
30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.

39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.
51. Efficacious grace: Efficacious grace is the working of God in an individual that cannot be thwarted and that leads that person to faith in Christ. It is also described as effective calling and irresistible grace.
52. Regeneration: Regeneration is the unseen and unfelt work of the Holy Spirit that overcomes depravity and brings spiritual life and the capacity to please God and exercise faith.
53. Spirit baptism is the nonphysical act of the Spirit of God that places a believer in the Body of Christ and makes him a partaker, along with all other believers, of the work and merits of Christ; should be distinguished from filling, sealing, and indwelling; cannot be felt or noticed, and hence must be appropriated by faith; there is no warrant in Scripture for assuming a second act of God for power, a 'baptism,' after salvation.
54. Sealing is a guarantee that the believer will persevere in Christ all the way to entrance into heaven, when God completes his work of purchasing the individual. It begins at the moment of salvation when the Father places the Holy Spirit in the believer for permanent indwelling. It is unseen and unfelt and should result in praise and obedience to the Spirit.
55. Indwelling is the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual who has placed personal trust in Christ as Savior. Described in Jn. 14:17, this is the basis of His other ministries to the believer, such as sealing, anointing and filling and establishes the believer as a part of the spiritual temple that God is building today.
56. The filling of the Spirit is 1) A constant characteristic of a believer's life that consists of regular control by the Spirit that produces Christlikeness through Scripture; 2) A special enablement at particular times for service during the first century.
57. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service.
58. A cessationist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are not present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
59. A continualist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
60. An angel is an individual, personal spirit being originally created by God to assist him in his plan for saving the elect.
61. The cosmos is Satan's organized spiritual system, in rebellion against God.