

## Satan and Demons

Nearly every Christian that I meet almost daily says words something like these: “The country is ruined... The devil has had his way... the end can’t be far away.” Well, I guess every day is a step closer the Lord’s Second Coming. But the Lord hasn’t returned yet, and so, until He does, we are at war constantly with Satan and his evil angels. Even though we are protected by the Lord, nevertheless our spiritual enemies are powerful, and will do all they can to lead us away from Christ – to lose faith and be doomed to everlasting hell.

But can people really be oppressed or possessed by demonic forces? What does the Bible say about these creatures?

Scripture tells us that Satan was originally an angel, but he rebelled against God and, as punishment, was cast out of heaven (Luke 10:18), along with one third of the angels (Revelation 12:4) who had allied themselves with him.

We find demons (also defined as “evil spirits”) in the Old Testament in Judges 9:23 and 1 Samuel 28, and all over the New Testament (eg. Matthew 8, Luke 10, Acts 19, Revelation 12). Satan (mentioned 47 times in the OT and NT) is the leader of the demons. He is also known as Day Star (Isaiah 14:12), Apollyon (Revelation 9:11), Abaddon (Job, Psalm, Proverbs, Revelation), a “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8), the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), the Evil One (Matthew 13, John 17, Ephesians 6, etc.), and the devil (cited 32 times in the NT). Also, Satan /the devil are mentioned over 100 times in our Lutheran Confessions.

But do Satan and demons still exist today? Absolutely. Our Lord makes clear that evil forces have existed since Genesis 3, and will until the Last Day (2 Corinthians 2:11, Galatians 1:3-4). We live on a spiritual battlefield in which Satan and his armies continue to wage war against Christ and His Kingdom. As St. Paul says, “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places,*” (Ephesians 6:10).

Supernatural warfare is real. This unsettling fact begs two questions: Exactly how do Satan and his demons attempt to hurt us and how can we defend ourselves against them?

The ultimate goal of Satan is to destroy our faith in Jesus Christ, the One who defeated him on the cross of Calvary and in the empty tomb. The devil attempts this in a number of ways: By tempting us to doubt the veracity of Scripture and by twisting the good creations of God into counterfeits that whittle away our trust in God.

For instance, Satan perverts sanctified marital intercourse into pornography or fornication or homosexuality; salvation by grace is warped into “works righteousness;” and divine creation is distorted into Darwinian evolution - just to name a few. Another favourite tactic of Satan is to accuse God’s redeemed children of sins that have long since been forgiven in Christ (Job 1:9, Zechariah 3:1). In this way Satan tries to shame us into believing that we have no right to associate with the people of God or to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament (and thus Christ’s continued forgiveness!) in church.

Why these attacks against us?

Living in the kingdom of Satan from our conception on (Psalm 51:5), at our Baptism we are pulled out of Satan’s evil realm and placed into the Kingdom of Christ. The “Alternate Form Based on Luther’s Baptism Rite” emphasises this point: “The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of

the devil until Christ claims us as His own. Therefore, depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (*Pastoral Care Companion*, CPH, 2007, 16). While Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (*Small Catechism*), this does not diminish the fact that Satan would like nothing more than to kidnap us and drag us back into his realm (Mark 5:1-20; 9;14-29; Luke 8:26-39).

On the cross and in the empty tomb our Lord defeated death and Satan, the deceiver, tempter, and accuser. Yet for reasons we do not really understand, God still allows Satan to roam the earth (1 Peter 5:8) and cause great harm to His people.

Therefore, until our Lord finally casts Satan and his evil angels into hell at the Last Day (Revelation 20:7-10), Jesus Christ continues to fight *our* spiritual battles *for us* with His “whole armour of God” - the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, Gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and prayer (Ephesians 6:10-19). All of these riches are embodied in the Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament), which we regularly receive in the Divine Service. This is one more reason to go to church regularly - to fortify ourselves against the Evil One!

Therefore, in order to protect yourself against the demonic, “*be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). Demons can and *do* attack people. Their victims are primarily unbaptised.

However, God sometimes allows even the baptised to be oppressed, so that they would turn away from any grievous and habitual sins and grow in their faith (1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 1:20).

Common “on-ramps” for the demonic are Ouija boards, people’s curiosity in the occult, curses, or spells; yet also sexual abuse, grievous sin/s (also of fathers, Exodus 20:5); homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27), depravity, pornography, and the “practice of sinning” (1 John 3:4-10).

Nevertheless, keep in mind that Christ knows all our problems, “even the hairs of your head” (Matthew 10:30). Also, what Satan means for evil, God means for good (Genesis 50:20), and for God’s people *all* things work for good (Romans 8:28).

Without Christ, we humans are powerless against the evil forces. Yet Christ is infinitely stronger than Satan and his demons. Psychiatrists, pharmaceuticals, etc., can help people combat certain mental illnesses, but these secular means are powerless against the demonic.

Only Christ can defeat the Evil One. Therefore, DO NOT explore the things of Satan, or meddle with fortune tellers, psychics, the occult, etc. DO NOT sin habitually and wilfully.

Yet DO make going to church *regularly* a life-long habit, DO take the Sacrament regularly, read Scripture daily, and lead a “godly life” (1 Timothy 2:2). But most of all, remember that *you* do not have to fight against Satan, the tempter and accuser, and his demons because Jesus Christ has ALREADY won the war *for you*. And because *Jesus* has won, *you* have won as well!