



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 3.4.3 – The Doctrine of Creation

### The Kingdom of Darkness

There are two mistakes we can make with regard to the devil and demons. One is that we can deny their existence altogether. This is the mistake that many have made in our modern age. The other mistake we can make is to exaggerate the devil's presence and power to the point that we are afraid of him and believe that there is no way for us to withstand him and his evil ways.

The devil certainly does exist, as do the evil spirits, even though we cannot see them. The devil is a formidable foe having a well-organized kingdom with vast power and influence. The apostle Paul called him **"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience"** (Ephesians 2:2). He also called him **"the god of this age"** (2 Corinthians 4:4). The book of Revelation calls him **"the great dragon," "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world"** (Revelation 12:9). The apostle John wrote: **"The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"** (1 John 5:19). Jesus Himself called the devil **"the ruler of this world"** (John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11). His name Satan emphasizes that he is the adversary of God and our adversary or enemy as well. His name devil emphasizes that he loves to accuse us of sin and slander us. His name Beelzebub describes him as a god of flies and filth. His name Belial means that he is worthless.

There is no time of grace for the devil and his angels. There is no indication in the Bible anywhere that it is possible for the fallen angels to repent. They are confirmed in their sin, and all that remains for them is the eternal judgment. As Jesus said, **"the everlasting fire" is "prepared for the devil and his angels"** (Matthew 25:41). In John's vision of the judgment, he saw that **"the devil...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 20:10).

Since the devil is at work in the sons of disobedience, we can say that all unbelievers are spiritually possessed by the devil. **"Satan entered Judas...So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him (Jesus) to them"** (Luke 22:3). On the very night of the betrayal we are again informed that **"Satan entered him"** (John 13:27) and Judas then went out into the dark night to carry out his wicked plan. Peter attributed Ananias' scheme of holding back part of the money from a sale, while pretending to give it all, a work of the devil. He said to him: **"Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"** (Acts 5:3). Paul attributed the unbelief of those who rejected Christ's Gospel to the devil: **"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"** (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

The unbelievers are already under the devil's control, and so he concentrates his attacks on believers. In particular he attacks the leaders of believers, so that many will be brought down through the influence of a few. The devil even tried to tempt Jesus to sin without success, using the Word of God in his vicious attack (Matthew 3:4-11). Consider the way Satan went after Job's possessions and family and even Job's own body as soon as God gave him permission. He murders and lies in order to accomplish his purpose. Paul called his **"thorn in the flesh" "a messenger of Satan to buffet"** him (2 Corinthians 12:7).

In Jesus' parable of the sower and his seed, the birds who devoured the seeds by the roadside are a picture of the way **"the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown"** (Matthew 13:19) in the heart of one listening to God's Word. In His parable of the weeds among the wheat, the enemy who sowed the weeds in the field represents **"the devil"** (Matthew 13:39). On the evening of His arrest Jesus warned Peter: **"Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat"** (Luke 22:31).

The devil and his evil spirits entered the bodies of many persons in the days of Jesus and His apostles. The troubled persons who were possessed bodily in this way by evil spirits had no control over their own actions. When Jesus and His apostles were confronted by those who were possessed by evil spirits, they drove them out and restored the victims to their normal selves. For example, we read in Matthew 9:32-33: **"Behold, they brought to Him (Jesus) a man, mute and demon-possessed. And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke."** A more extreme case involved the son of a man who said to Jesus: **"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."** We are then told that **"Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour"** (Matthew 17:15-18).

Perhaps the most extreme case was that of **"a man (actually there were two men, as we learn from Matthew 8:28) with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones"** (Mark 5:2-5). This man had a legion of demons controlling him, but after Jesus drove out his demons, they **"saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind"** (Mark 5:15).

The presence of evil spirits and belief in evil spirits have terrified many persons through the years in many countries of the world. The second mistake one can make with regard to the devil and his kingdom of darkness is to be so overwhelmed by his apparent power and influence that one sees no way of escape. We need to realize that Jesus always won, always wins, and always will win any contest He has with the kingdom of darkness. **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"** (1 John 3:8). Not only did Jesus drive out evil spirits, but He overcame the spiritual hold Satan has over sinners by suffering and dying for the sin of the world. **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Now we can follow the instruction of James, the brother of our Lord: **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"** (James 4:7). Peter likewise instructs us: **"Resist him, steadfast in the faith"** (1 Peter 5:9). How do we overcome the devil and his temptations? The book of Revelation tells us: **"The accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony"** (Revelation 12:10-11). When the devil tempts us to despair by accusing us of sin and telling us we must therefore be punished, we can respond by saying that Jesus has already been punished for our sins on the cross. This is how we overcome him.

We may wonder why our Lord allows the devil to have any power at all in this world, since he has been defeated and awaits eternal judgment. We do not know all the answers, but it is clear that the devil's presence gives us opportunity to use **"the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"** (Ephesians 6:16) and **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (Ephesians 6:17). We walk in the certain hope that total and permanent victory will come soon. **"The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly"** (Romans 16:20).

## Questions

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1. What are the two mistakes we can make regarding the devil and his demons?
2. What are some of the names and descriptions given to the devil?
3. What is the eternal destiny of the devil and all his evil spirits?
4. What is the difference between spiritual possession and bodily possession?
5. Give some Bible examples of both types of possession.
6. How did Jesus finally overcome all the power of the devil?
7. How are we to resist the devil and his evil forces today?
8. What is generally believed about evil spirits in your locale?
9. What is the difference between ordinary disease and bodily possession?
10. Give some examples of the devil's activity in our world today.