

The Christian's Battle against Disinformation

The Clashing of Swords

Carmen J. Bryant

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Foreword

Joseph Stalin is remembered for his atrocities against the Russians and the Khmer Rouge for its genocide of the Cambodians, but Adolph Hitler remains the most infamous name of recent times. He cannot be forgotten for his calculated destruction of millions of Jews and other non-Aryan people. He, perhaps more than any other in the 20th century, has been depicted as Satan personified. With disdain for God and Truth, he became a god unto himself, beginning and ending his career with evil.

It is ironic that such a man—for he was indeed a man and not a god—could utter truth mingled with his lies, and even write truth *about* lies. His observations about the “big lie” have been repeated often since he first wrote them in *Mein Kampf*:

[In] the size of the lie there is always contained a certain factor of credibility, since the great masses of a people may be more corrupt in the bottom of their hearts than they will be consciously and intentionally bad, therefore with the primitive simplicity of their minds they will more easily fall victims to a great lie than to a small one, since they themselves perhaps also lie sometimes in little things, but would certainly still be too much ashamed of too great lies. Thus such an untruth will not at all enter their heads, and therefore they will be unable to believe in the possibility of the enormous impudence of the most infamous distortion in others; indeed they may doubt and hesitate even when being enlightened, and they accept any cause at least as nevertheless being true; therefore, just for this reason some part of the most impudent lie will remain and stick; a fact which all great lying artists and societies of this world know only too well and therefore also villainously employ.¹

Adolph Hitler was one of those whom he himself described as “corrupt in the bottom of their hearts.” Following in the footsteps of his spiritual master, he spoke the language of lies. He was both a master and a victim of disinformation.

¹ Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939), 313.

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*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. (Jn. 8:44)*

Satan is a master of disinformation, false information that has been deliberately spread, often covertly, with the intent to deceive.² *Disinformation* is to be distinguished from *misinformation*, which is merely false information disseminated due to a lack of understanding or based upon a false impression. The principle difference is in the *intent* of the action. Disinformation is passed on deliberately. Misinformation comes by way of unintentional error. Satan functions at the disinformation level, for his intent is to deceive.

The foundational truths

As believers, we are members of the family of God, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, redeemed, forgiven. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, where Jesus Christ, the true Light of the world, is King. The Father has made available to us all that is necessary for being transformed into the image of the Son, after whom we are to pattern our lives. He has sent his Spirit to live in us and empower us, the same Spirit that dwelled in Jesus and gave him power to win over Satan and temptation while in the flesh.

Through that Spirit, he gained victory at the cross for all time over Satan, sin and death, a victory that is efficacious for all who believe.

The Spirit also works within us to bring about spiritual maturity and abundant life even while the physical body heads toward death. It is the Spirit who enables us to use the spiritual armor the Father has already supplied to fight all the powers of evil—those that work by way of our still existent sinful nature, and those that attack from without.

The paradoxical reality is that the war in which we are engaged is one in which the enemy, Satan, has already been defeated. His defeat is more than potential, for the outcome is certain. Jesus Christ won the war at the cross. However, as with many other spiritual realities, the *already* is *not yet*. This defeated enemy still rules his kingdom of darkness, its citizens enslaved to him and to sin. Even more pertinent for the believer is the fact that Satan still maintains the power to affect those who are no longer members of his kingdom. He can influence the unwary to go astray and can overcome in individual combat those whose armor is rusty or left unused.

Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Genesis records his lies to Eve, and Revelation prophesies his deceit of the nations before his final doom. If the prophecy of Isa. 14:12-14 indeed looks beyond the king of Babylon to the Evil One who inspired the king's actions, then Satan's own pride involved a lie to himself even before Eden, when he said "I will be like God"—as though there were any possibility of attaining such a goal. From the beginning of his career in evil until his future judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:9), he was and is a liar.

² *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "disinformation."

The disinformation campaign

Satan's goal is to destroy. He will use whatever tactics and schemes may prove effective toward his ultimate aim of destroying God's creation, especially man, who was created to worship and glorify God. Temptation, deceit and accusation are the three broad categories into which his tactics fall. For the Christian, a synergetic relationship exists among the three, for underlying both temptation and accusation is the fundamental element of deceit. The lure of temptation is a deceptive blind, seducing the believer with promised benefits that can at best be only temporary, while hiding the ruin that lies behind the bait. The accusations he whispers into the believer's heart and mind bring reproachful and false allegations that try to erode a believer's faith in the finished work of Christ.

Mixing truth with lie, Satan is on a never-ending campaign of disinformation.

Turning Truth into lie

It began in the Garden of Eden, the Paradise God had prepared for his final creation. God had declared everything up to that point to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31).³ The man and woman were in God's own image, created to make visible God's likeness on earth. The Creator had given them every good thing so that they lacked nothing that was necessary for their survival or happiness. He had already spoken to Adam and Eve, imparting his instructions for work and worship. The implication from later events is that the man and wife had regular fellowship with God.⁴

³ All biblical quotations are from the *New International Version*.

⁴ Gen. 3:8. When God came to the garden, Adam and Eve recognized his approach, implying that they were familiar with his presence.

Into the middle of this blissful dwelling slithered the serpent, Satan, swathed in the disguise of a beguiling serpent. Eve did not know fear, for she did not know evil. She soon found out the meaning of both as a result of Satan’s disinformation campaign. Satan misused the words of the Creator, first casting doubt on their veracity, then twisting and distorting them to suggest a meaning other than what God had intended.

| <i>God said –</i> | <i>Satan said –</i> |
|--|---|
| "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil..." (Gen. 2:16) | "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1) |
| "....for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:16) | "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5) |

What did Eve know about *dying* in a world that had not yet experienced death? Had God explained to Adam and Eve what he meant by “surely die?” We cannot know how fully Eve comprehended God’s warning. Nevertheless, having never encountered anything but good, she obviously could not conceive of the devastation disobedience would bring. Satan played upon her ignorance, twisting the truth in such a way that, in her mind, what was forbidden became desirable. Evil was made to look like good, and Eve did not know the difference—until too late.

From the time Paradise was lost until the present age, Satan has continued to deceive God’s people by twisting truth in a deliberate attempt to entice them away from the blessings of faith and bring about their spiritual downfall. Good is made to look like evil and evil like good, with God himself made out to be the source of the information. Only after the destruction does the victim realize the true nature of Satan’s disinformation campaign. By then, it is too late to reverse the effects of his battle strategy.

Lies in the name of God

In the Garden, Satan came personally to Eve, wrapped in the finery of a living serpent. Following Adam and Eve's downfall, it was no longer necessary for Satan to resort to such devices. Fallen from the glory of God in which they had been created, human beings themselves became Satan's tools.

God revealed his truth to man through his prophets, entrusting them with the dissemination of that truth. Satan also had prophets through whom he spoke his lies. Satan could not speak truth because, as Jesus said, his native language is lying (Jn. 8:44). However, he could take the *words* of truth and incorporate them into his own language, translating good into evil, perverting God's message into a lie. The possibility for deception lay in the combination of Satan's own evil schemes with the intermediary use of a willing or deceived human being. Such a false prophet could then compete for credibility with the true prophets of God, especially if the perverted message were spoken in the name of God.

False messengers of this kind were prevalent during the gradual decline of Israel and Judah after the fall of the united kingdom under David and Solomon. As the people became increasingly involved in the deceit and decadence of idolatry, more false prophets arose to convince the people that God would *not really* bring all the disaster upon them written in the Book of Moses. The lie was a variation of the same one the serpent told Eve: *You shall not surely die.*

| <i>God said (through his prophets)</i> | <i>Satan said (through his prophets)</i> |
|---|---|
| <p>“...if you do not obey the LORD your God...The sky over your head will be bronze, ... The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies...Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.” (Deut. 28:15,23-25, 64)</p> <p>“I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague.” (Jer. 14:12)</p> | <p>“He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.” (Jer. 5:12)</p> <p>...“You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.” (Jer. 14:13)</p> |
| <p>“Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...” (Jer. 27:6)</p> | <p>“You will not serve the king of Babylon...” (Jer. 27:14)</p> |

It can be said that the false prophets were willingly being used by Satan in that they had rejected the truth of God in order to follow a lie. They set themselves up against Yahweh, choosing to follow the false gods of the nations around them. They were entranced with their own visions and entrenched in the deceit of which they themselves had become victims. Even in showdowns with the true prophets of God, they deliberately chose to remain on the side of the lie.

Where were these false prophets getting their messages? Jeremiah lists several possibilities: “Then the LORD said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you **false visions, divinations, idolatries** and the **delusions of their own minds**’” (Jer. 14:14).⁵ In other words, they actually were receiving messages, but they were deceived as to the source. Having strayed from the pure worship of Yahweh, they opened themselves up to the delusions of the devil, all the while convinced that it was Yahweh himself who was sending them messages. They knew the Name, but did not know his voice.

⁵ It is worth noting that although these four categories are connected with idolatrous religious systems and the occult, they are not limited to counterfeit religions. False visions and delusions producing so-called messages from God can—and do—show up among people who would want nothing to do with a carved idol. Then as now, the un-

Such deceit involves two persons—the deceiver and the deceived. The people of Israel and Judah who had steeped themselves in idolatry had hearts that were fully willing to listen to the lies of the false prophets. Their own corrupt natures made them easy prey to Satan’s destructive plan to turn people away from God their Savior.

*A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land:
The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way. (Jer. 5:30-31)*

Not everyone was spiritually unfaithful, however. Even in the most corrupt days of Israel and Judah, there remained those who would not serve idols but kept their hearts turned toward Yahweh.⁶ How did such righteous persons respond to false prophets—not the prophets of false gods but those who falsely claimed to speak for the Lord? According to Ezek. 13:17-23, they were disheartened: “you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief....”

In what way were the righteous disheartened? The context suggests more than just discouragement over the prevalence of lying prophets. The prophetesses being censured in this passage were not only encouraging the wicked to continue in their sin, but they were also denouncing the righteous. Thus the righteous were personally stricken by the content of the messages. The prophetesses were using God’s name to announce judgment upon people whose only crime was to remain faithful to Yahweh in the midst of a perverse nation.⁷

wary follower of Yahweh could be deceived into thinking himself to be a spokesman for God when in reality he was passing along messages from the Deceiver.

⁶ During the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, the worship of Baal was so prevalent that Elijah thought he was the only one left in the kingdom who still worshipped God. He was reminded that there were still many faithful among God’s chosen people: “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him (1 Kgs. 19:18).

⁷ “They do harm to the righteous and good, and strengthen the hands of the wicked. *הִפְחִיל*, *Hiphil* of *פָּחַח*, in Syriac, to use harshly or depress; so here in the *Hiphil*, connected with *לָבַח*, to afflict the heart. *שֶׁקֶר* is used adverbially: with

There is only one way that such lies could discourage the righteous—if *they believed them*. In other words, even the faithful were being deceived.

This raises the question of discernment. How would a faithful person under the Law know which prophet was genuine when so many spoke in the name of God? Two criteria are written in the Pentateuch for determining who was a false prophet.

1. *If the prophecy did not come true, the prophet was not from God (Deut. 18:19-22).*

Waiting for a prophecy to be fulfilled, however, takes time. Fulfillment or non-fulfillment occurs in time and history. Personal reaction to a personalized prophecy deals with feelings toward something that has not yet become history. It is not yet known either as factual or non-factual. When someone deceitfully speaks judgment in the name of God to someone who has high regard for that Name, Satan uses the lie to bore into and injure a sensitive heart.⁸

The false prophets and prophetesses would eventually receive their just reward, but only after they caused suffering for others. As servants of Satan and victims of his lies—for anyone who is not a servant of God is a slave to sin and Satan (Jn. 8:34)—they were also his tools for propagating disinformation intended to damage the righteous. There must be other criteria by which the faithful can know who is speaking the word of God and who is speaking the lies of the devil. The second criterion for determining a false prophet is found in Deut. 13:1-3.

lying, or in a lying manner; namely, by predicting misfortune and divine punishments, with which they threatened the godly, who would not acquiesce in their conduct; whereas, on the contrary, they predicted prosperity and peace to the ungodly, who were willing to be ensnared by them, and thus strengthened them in their evil ways. For this God would put them to shame through His judgments, which would make their deceptions manifest, and their sooth-saying loathsome.” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1989), vol. 9, 176-177).

⁸ Sensitive, because a *hard* heart isn’t normally concerned about what God has to say.

2. *If the prophecy came true, or a miraculous sign was performed, but the total message included utterances that were contrary to God's law—particularly with relationship to worshipping other gods—then the prophet was false.*

God warned that false prophets would indeed appear on the scene. They would be used by God as a test “to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 13:3). This passage would indicate, then, that no one should unthinkingly accept the words of a prophet without testing the message against the revealed Word of God.

God himself opposes such self-assured prophets and expects his people to do the same.

“Therefore,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares the LORD. “They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD. (Jer. 23:30-32)

If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. (Deut. 18:19-20)

Lies from the people of God

In order to undo the destruction that Satan had worked in the Garden of Eden, God promised a Messiah, a savior-king who would redeem his people and save them from their sins.

Working through the hearts of fallible people with distorted understanding, Satan changed the message of the prophecies just enough so that those who should have known the message the best—the religious teachers—recognized neither the Messiah nor his forerunner when they came. They knew the *words* of the prophecies but missed the *message*. Being deceived themselves,

they could only pass on a distorted message in their teaching, resulting in many others believing a false version of God’s original proclamation.

| <i>God’s message</i> | <i>Satan’s message</i> |
|--|--|
| <i>(through John the Baptist)</i> Repent, for the time of the Messiah is near and judgment is coming. (Matt. 3:2-3,12) | <i>(through the religious leaders)</i> We don’t need to repent. We are Abraham’s descendants and are heirs of the promises. (Matt. 3:9; Jn. 8:33-37) |
| <i>(through John the Baptist)</i> “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” (Jn. 1:23) ⁹ | <i>(through the religious leaders)</i> He has a demon. (Matt. 11:18, Jn. 8:48,52) |
| Jesus of Nazareth is my beloved Son. (Matt. 3:17,17:5) | He is not the one. He is a blasphemer. (Matt. 26:23-26) |

Jesus knew he would be rejected and crucified. In spite of Satan’s repeated efforts to destroy the Messiah,¹⁰ Jesus fulfilled his mission, rising triumphantly from the dead on the third day, forever defeating sin and death (1 Cor. 15:20-56, Rom. 6-8). At the same time he destroyed Satan, the ruler of the Kingdom of Darkness, wresting from him the keys of death and the grave (Rev. 1:18). When Satan was defeated, all the powers that give allegiance to him were also defeated (Col. 2:15).

Defeated at the cross—yet his lies go on. Clinton E. Arnold, in his book *Powers of Darkness*, draws from an analogy which likens the *already-not yet* reality of Satan’s defeat to what happened in Europe during the last year of World War II. When the Allied forces invaded Normandy on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), the final outcome of the war was determined. Many battles remained, however, before the armies of Hitler and his European allies were silenced on May 8,

⁹ A fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3.

¹⁰ For example, Herod’s slaughter of the male children of Bethlehem (Matt. 2); the attempt to destroy the Messiah’s qualifications by tempting Jesus to sin (Matt. 4:1-11); and the attack against Jesus in Nazareth when the town’s citizens tried to kill him by pushing him over the cliff (Luk. 4:28-30).

1945 (VE-Day).¹¹ Similarly, we continue to fight the remaining battles until the heavenly Victor consummates all of human history with a final battle and the last judgment (Rev. 20:7-15). The cross determined Satan’s doom, but it did not interrupt his disinformation campaign.

In keeping with his word to the disciples, Jesus returned to the Father forty days after his resurrection (Jn. 14:1-4, 28-31, Acts 1:1-9). Before he left, he promised that he would return. To the unbelieving world, it is a foolish idea. To the Christian, it is a promise filled with hope. Again working through false teachers, Satan turned the hope of the believers in Thessalonica into confusion and despair. Bewildered because of contradictory letters and reports that supposedly had come from Paul himself, they were shaken, afraid that their hope was a false one (2 Thes. 2:1-5). How were they to know what was true, when all the messages claimed apostolic authority?

| <i>God says –</i> | <i>Satan says –</i> |
|--|---|
| Jesus will return! (Jn. 14:1-3, Acts 1:10) | “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Pet. 3:4) |
| Jesus is coming soon! | He has already come – you were left behind. (2 Thes. 2:1-2) |

Paul first chided them, “Don’t you remember what I taught you?” What he had taught them in person as an apostle of Christ was revealed truth from God. They should not waver from it. Secondly, he gave them further instruction, enlightening their understanding so that they would not be led astray in the future: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way” (2 Thes. 2:5).

¹¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 123. The analogy is attributed to A. M. Hunter, as cited in J. Christian Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 159.

Paul's warning was not new. Jesus himself forewarned his followers that they needed to watch out for Satan's deception with regard to his second coming. It was not those who did not believe in Christ's return that needed the warning. Rather, it was those who were expecting him.

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." (Matt. 24:4-5)

Jesus is indeed coming again. Until he does, we as believers will be in a continual battle with the Deceiver, the one who spreads disinformation about the very foundations of our faith. Truth is under attack, and the followers of truth continue to be targets of Satan's disinformation campaign.

The centrality of Truth

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). Through the truth he taught, people were to be made free (Jn. 8:31-32). When he ascended to the Father, he sent the Spirit of Truth to indwell all who follow him: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (Jn. 16:13).

Jesus affirmed the veracity of Scripture (Jn. 10:35), the Word of Truth. God's revealed truth in the Scriptures and in his Son, the Living Word, is the foundation of our faith. Scripture discloses the true nature of God and the true nature of man. It is the light the Spirit uses to guide man out of darkness toward the eternal Light, Jesus Christ. It is the lamp needed to keep the believer walking in the light, so as to avoid stumbling at the obstacles Satan puts in our way. In Scripture, God uses *words* in an undistorted *message* to keep us in the light.

Paul employs the analogy of a building to describe the Church, a spiritual building erected upon the foundation of the teachings of the prophets and apostles.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)

To destabilize the building, one need only destroy the foundation. It is no surprise, then, that one of Satan's chief means of deceiving the believer is to attack the foundation of his faith, the Word of God. It is another form of his approach to Eve—casting doubt on what God has said and then persuading his victim that God could not possibly have meant what the words sound like.

What is Truth?

More subtle is Satan's using the Word of God itself. The Bible was intended to be a weapon for the Christian soldier to fight against Satan's lies and on behalf of truth (Eph. 6:17), a weapon to promote righteousness and defeat everything that is false. However, even as the false prophets of old claimed to be speaking by the authority of God, so the modern false prophet continues the practice. In this present age he attempts to back up the "dreams and imaginations of his own heart" (cf. Jer. 14:14) by appealing to the book revered by the Church as being the true revelation of God. How does he do this? By using the *words* but distorting the *message*.

Thus the true prophet of God becomes pitted against the false prophet, each with Bible in hand, each claiming responsibility for the proclamation of God's message, each vying for the soul of the people. Both are holding the same Sword. In the hand of one, the Sword brings life

and defends from evil. In the hand of the other, it aims to maim and destroy those who are in the Father's hand (cf. Jn. 10:10, 28-29). Sword clashes against sword.

Some who teach falsely do it deliberately for personal gain. Others act out of conviction, passing on a distorted message as *misinformation* because they themselves have been deceived by Satan's *disinformation*. Regardless of the motivation, the distorted message is false, capable of destroying the believer's faith and very life. In the commotion of the battle, it is difficult to know what Truth is.

No one should be surprised at Satan's attempt to use the Word of God in this way. If he was willing to try such a tactic with Jesus, the Son of God, should we think that we are immune from such attack?

| <i>God said –</i> | <i>Satan said —</i> |
|---|--|
| <p>He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty...</p> <p>If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. (Ps. 91:1,9-12)</p> | <p>If you are the Son of God...throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” (Matt. 4:6)</p> |

If Satan had only misquoted Scripture, then the tactic would be easier to spot. However, he quoted it exactly. He just didn't quote *all* of it. He took it out of context, ignoring the fact that the protection of angels was promised to the one who puts his total trust in the Almighty, not the person who accepts a dare from the Evil One to put God to an illegitimate test. In a clashing of swords, Jesus responded to Satan's attack. The Word rightly used defeated the Word misused.

| <i>Satan said –</i> | <i>Jesus said –</i> |
|---|--|
| If you are the Son of God...throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” (Matt. 4:6) | It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Matt. 4:7, quoting Deut: 6:16: “Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.”) |

There is no substitute for knowing the Word of God—all of it. Knowing only part of God’s Word is like fighting a duel with a sword whose blade lacks a fine edge. It is still a weapon in the hands of one committed to Christ, but its effect is lessened against someone as cunning as Satan.

Furthermore, there must be more than an intellectual knowledge of its contents. Spiritual discernment is needed for interpreting its meaning, discernment that only comes from a close walk with God involving continual prayer, developing a spiritual life for a spiritual battle. We are not merely matching wits against a human competitor but instead trying to stand firm against the invisible world of Satan and all the powers of evil (Eph. 6:12).

It is the false teacher wearing Christian garb and carrying a Bible who is the most dangerous. Like the proverbial wolf in sheep’s clothing, he is dangerous because he is not easily discerned. This false prophet also knows the Word of God—or at least appears to. Instead of using the Word as a tool of Truth to bring freedom, he brandishes it as a deadly weapon to trap the unwary into legalism or some other form of enslavement. Regardless of whether the false teacher is a wolf in sheep’s clothing or a sheep that is behaving like a wolf, his teaching is equally dangerous.

Paul saw such teaching as originating from the demons themselves—the “elemental spirits”¹²—used to put believers into a disheartening bondage. Like the false prophets of ancient Israel, these teachers denounce the righteous and commend those who follow laws not given by God. Paul speaks sharp words in Galatians regarding those who preach legalism—and also to those who are so foolish as to buy into their teaching.

Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (Gal. 1:7-8)
You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Gal. 3:1-3)

The false teachers were taking something that was essentially good, i.e., the Law, and perverting it for their own purposes. The sin was theirs, yet the believers who bought into their lies were not without guilt. Paul’s constant admonition to the churches was “Beware! Don’t be deceived,” an admonition reiterated by the other writers of Scripture.

Satan’s deceits come in subtle ways. Even so, a wolf in sheep’s clothing is still going to smell like a wolf, and the sheep who is acting like a wolf is going to display wolf-like characteristics. Teachers whose lifestyles do not match the clear commands of Christ, teachers whose character is not gradually being transformed into the image of Christ—neither they nor their words are to be trusted. They may use the words of Scripture but they do not have its message. They are part of Satan’s disinformation campaign.

¹² τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Gal. 4:3). The term was used by both Jews and Greeks to refer to spirit beings (Arnold, 53-54).

Truth in spirit

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.
The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.
On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
We demolish arguments and every pretension
that sets itself up against the knowledge of God,
and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)*

This is a spiritual war, and the weapons are spiritual (Eph. 6:10-18). Satan may attack a person's body, as he did with Job. He may even attack the mind, bringing about confused thinking. Even so, it is the spirit that he ultimately wants to control. It is with the spirit—or heart—that one gives allegiance to God or to Satan. If Satan can control the spirit in any aspect, then he has a greater chance of controlling mind and body as well to do his bidding.

Satan's lies may come in any number of ways. Regardless of the stimulus Satan may use to arouse a response, that stimulus must be heard and interpreted by the human mind, a process of which a person may or may not be conscious. For this reason we are admonished to guard what we see, hear, talk about and even think about, taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Beyond the mind, however, the spirit also reacts. A spirit under the total control of the Holy Spirit—spirit communicating with Spirit—will recognize Satan's lies for what they are. If for any reason—for example, through negligence or deliberate sin—the believer's spiritual armor is not in working order, one of Satan's arrows can strike home, wounding the spirit. By allowing Satan to reach his spirit, the believer has given an opportunity to Satan to do even more damage (Eph. 6:27). Regardless of the kind of arrow Satan used to inflict the wound, it is a spiritual wound that needs spiritual healing, without which the entire person cannot be well.

Truth is still the remedy, but truth must first be discerned. It must reach beyond the intellect to the spirit. If Satan has gone as far as to deceive the believer's spirit, merely treating the wound in an intellectual manner is not going to arrive at the root of the deceit. To deal with a spiritual problem, one must go to the spiritual battlefield, the realm of prayer. In prayer, one draws directly upon the power of Christ to face and defeat the enemy spirit or spirits that are unlawfully holding the believer's spirit captive. Although Christians are encouraged to do *everything* with prayer, the prayer that brings freedom to the spirit involves a major encounter with the forces of spiritual darkness. It is not without reason that Paul concludes his outline of spiritual armor with the plea, "With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18).

The power of Truth in community

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down, his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!...
Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Eccl. 4:9-10, 12)*

Every believer has the right to resist and rebuke Satan when he is attacked, even as Jesus did. The believer's position in Christ has given him that authority. However, a believer who has been the victim of Satan's disinformation campaign may not even be cognizant of the deception. Here it is well to remember that only one war is being fought: the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. There is only one army, and only one Commander-in-Chief. The soldiers of an army do not normally fight alone but as units, each soldier in the unit carrying out the duty he has been assigned but at the same time considering the welfare of the other sol-

diers in the unit. When one soldier gets off course and forgets the battle plan, he endangers the rest of the unit. When one soldier is wounded, the entire unit is adversely affected.

In the same way, the Christian does not fight alone. There are indeed individual attacks for which a person is responsible to put up resistance. The individual attacks, however, are only a part of greater battles than involve more than a single target. In establishing the Church, God provided for a *community* of believers who are intended to watch out and care for each other in their common battle.

Truth has been entrusted to the Church in the form of the written Word of God. The Church, however, is made up of fallible saints who are not yet conformed to the image of Christ. The possibilities for distorting revealed truth are countless. However, the Holy Spirit has enabled each member of the community of believers in such a way that, working together, they have the ability to safeguard the foundations of the faith handed down by the prophets and apostles and to carry out all the commands of Christ. In addition, some members have been endowed with special wisdom and ability for the purpose of helping others to understand and live the truth, so that all may grow in the wisdom that has been made available to us in Christ (Col. 2:3).

It is the responsibility of the community of believers, and especially its leaders, to detect the false teachers among them and call them to account (1 Tim. 1:3-4). It is also the community's responsibility to watch out for any believer among them who is being lulled into deceit, being taken in by the lies of the Enemy. The individual Christian is a part of that community and needs to recognize and submit to the spiritual leadership God has established (Heb. 13:17), without abdicating his own responsibility to watch out for Satan's deception. Satan's schemes are such that our spiritual safety requires the vigilance of all for the sake of all.

When one member of the community has been wounded by the lies of Satan, the rest need to see to his restoration. This may mean gentle counsel and encouragement leading toward spiritual maturity (1 Thes. 5:11), or it may mean loving rebuke for sin (Gal. 6:1-2). At other times, it may mean deliberately entering the battlefield of prayer with a Christian brother or sister to ferret out the truth about a specific wound, allowing the Spirit of God to work with our spirits to expose the enemy's presence and his lies in the realm of the spirit, beyond the limits of the intellect. Aided by another who has come alongside at the level of spirit, the wounded one can gain the strength in his own spirit to rebuke Satan and his deceitful work, bringing intellect *and* spirit into harmony with the truth. As redeemed saints, they stand firm together in the position they have in Christ, their spirits joining the Holy Spirit to renounce anything that is contrary to truth.

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