

Brief answers to the questions following up the speech,

“The Prince of Darkness Grim”: The Reformed Teaching on the Devil

Introduction: The reader will be best served by listening to the speech before these questions and answers are read. Both questions and answer presuppose a knowledge of what was said in the speech.

- 1. *How can one differentiate between the influence of the devil in one’s life and one’s sinful nature? Or is this question not relevant? (related questions: “Can you distinguish between the old man of sin and the work of Satan?”)***

This is a very relevant question. You may differentiate between the two. But I judge it to be more useful to relate the two. The devil finds an ally in my sinful nature. His temptations of us are possible because of my sinful nature. My sinful nature finds the devil’s whispers much to its liking. To speak more accurately, ****I**** find his temptations alluring.

- 2. *What role do you think Satan plays in mental health issues? (related question: “Do you have any experience with psychotic mental illness such as schizophrenia?”)***

First, I am not a professionally trained psychologist. My judgments are formed from over 25 years as a pastor, from my knowledge of Scripture, and from my reading of many books with wide ranges of judgments. Second, mental troubles are very difficult to deal with and very difficult to identify. I have counseled people whose mental problems could not be addressed by professionals, whose troubles are like the woman with the “issue of blood” in Luke 8: They “spent all (their) living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.” Third, mental problems seem to range in type from obviously physical in origin to the obviously spiritual. When I counsel those with “mental health issues,” I usually refer them to a medical doctor to rule out any obvious physiological problems. A doctor may profitably prescribe medications that are immensely helpful for the people of God. Then, when I, as a pastor, try to help people with “mental health issues,” I don’t want to rule out any factors, but acknowledge the real possibility of many factors. Some of these “many factors” are: 1) One’s unique (sinful) nature passed on from his parents may make him more susceptible to mental troubles. 2) One’s upbringing (“nurture,” here, rather than “nature”) may have taught him ways of looking at the world and thinking about life and responding to problems that will incline him to “mental problems.” 3) Abuse of drugs or alcohol. 4) Environmental pressures ... 5) Finally, the devil certainly has reason to try to disturb God’s people in their minds, causing them to doubt, robbing them of joy,

confusing their ability to think aright, or function among other people of God, etc. (read Mark 5:1-20 to see the results of the devil's destructive powers). I have not seen very many with mental issues that seemed to be the result of only one thing (except, perhaps, a clear case of post-partum depression.) Conclusion, do not rule out the place of the devil, but do not blame the devil for all mental health issues.

3. *When people get healed at a healing service, is that the devil working a miracle?*

First, understand that the devil is able to work miracles. This is sometimes denied by Christians. The passage mainly in question is II Thessalonians 2:9: "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." Some of the modern Bible versions wrongly translate this as "counterfeit miracles" or "fake wonders." The original says literally, "wonders of the lie." I understand this to mean "miracles done in the service of the lie." If God's miracles were always done in the service of the *truth* ("signs of an apostle;" II Cor. 12:12), *these* miracles are always done in the service of the lie, to promote false teachings that dishonour God. As Jannes and Jambres were able to do real miracles to duplicate some of those Moses and Aaron did (II Tim. 3:8), false apostles and prophets will do likewise. Remember what Jesus said would take place in the judgment day. Some, who would shortly be cast into everlasting hell, will say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Matt. 7:22; cf. Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:13-15; Deut. 13:1-2). Second, then, I have no doubt that wonders done in "healing services" may well be the work of the devil. (I say "may well" because of a number of factors. Were they truly "healings"? How many of these "healings" have been documented? Where are these "healers" today? Why aren't they going to hospitals, mental institutions, even graveyards, or poison-control centres to heal with the kinds of healings Jesus promised in Mark 16?) Third, if you wish to pursue this subject further, I refer you to Benjamin Warfield's fine *Counterfeit Miracles*, Alan Morrison's *The Serpent and the Cross: Religious Corruption in an Evil Age* and John F. MacArthur Jr.'s *Charismatic Chaos*.

4. *How could Satan have not known that he would, in crucifying Christ, destroy his goals of seizing the kingdom?*

In my speech I referred to (or at least alluded to) I Corinthians 2:8: "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." I take this to mean that had the devil known that crucifying Jesus would accomplish the salvation of God's elect, he would not

have directed the hearts of so many to bring about Christ's crucifixion. The direct answer to this question is, "The devil is not omniscient." God certainly could hide from the devil his grand, eternal, gracious, purpose of redeeming a church unto himself by the death of His own Son.

Answers, Part #2:

Before I answer the next set of questions, I can remind us to be careful to keep in view the main teaching of my lecture. These questions, interesting and even important from one point of view, must not take away from the clear and primary teachings of the Bible about Satan. That's not to say we ought to err in the other direction, supposing we can know nothing. A story, surely apocryphal, has it that a seminary professor walked into class one day, announcing, "The subject of today's lecture is angels and devils. I don't know anything about them. Class dismissed." A man who takes that view hasn't studied the Bible, because the Bible teaches us about devils and angels. At the same time, let us not speculate where the Bible is silent. One theologian last century said that when we speak about angels we should do so only "softly and incidentally," and that we should never look at the devil "too long or too intently." Good advice, in my judgment. Calvin warned strongly against both superstition and empty speculation about the devil. Let us know him in order to know how to battle him. With that, let's get on to the next questions:

5. Is there biblical proof to deny or support the belief that angels or devils can or cannot be seen on earth now in 2014?

Both angels and devils are spiritual beings (devils are fallen angels). Hebrews 1:14, for example, calls angels "ministering spirits." The New Testament also refers to devils as "spirits" (e.g., Mark 1:23; Matt. 8:16). Spirits are non-material and invisible. By definition, then, both angels and devils as they are naturally cannot be seen by us who are earthly, flesh and blood. In order to be seen, they must "appear," that is, must manifest themselves in some form that we are able to see. In the Old Testament, angels appeared in the form of men, as the three who visited Abraham (Gen. 18) and the one who encouraged Joshua outside the walls of Jericho (Josh. 5:13-15). There are many other Old Testament examples, perhaps most striking is the incident of Balaam, whose donkey was given to see what Balaam could not (Num. 22:22-31). At Christ's first coming, angels appeared to make the birth announcements (Luke 1:11, 26ff.; 2:9, 13). See also Matthew 28:2-7 and Mark 16:5 for appearances of angels after Christ's crucifixion. So the question could better be put: "Do devils make appearances on earth now in 2014?" I have heard extravagant stories of appearances of angels, but have not had anyone tell me that a devil appeared to them. Does the Bible record appearances of the devil? He came to tempt Jesus. He will be manifested

in the personal antichrist (II Thess. 2:3-4, 9). Does the New Testament speak of other appearances? Please tell me if you know of any. What I warn you is that, if he does appear, he will not show his fangs and claws (see the important passage in II Cor. 11:13-15). And we must distinguish angels from devils, not according to what we see, but according to how they speak. The devil will show “horns of a lamb” (Christ-like), but will speak like a dragon (Rev. 13:11).

6. *(Many asked about what the devil can know. I list the following questions together, as they all address this subject): *Can the devil know our thoughts—can he read our minds? Does he hear my most private prayers and thoughts? *Does the devil possess some type of omniscience? Can he know our thoughts? Can he make suggestions to our thoughts—Can he plant in our sub conscience? *Does the devil have the power to know the thoughts of a believer? *Does Satan know who God’s elect are? Does he know that he cannot take God’s elect? Is so, why does he continue to try? *Are “the books” open to Satan—does he know from birth (or before) who belongs to Jesus; or are we provided a “covering” by Christ’s angels and do they war with Satan’s hosts for our souls?*

These questions deal with two main subjects—both what the devil can know and what the devil can do. First, remember that the devil, as a created being, has limitations. He is not God. Even the good angels have limitations—of time, space, power, and knowledge. Time: these creatures cannot go back or forward in time; as well, they are bound to time, are creatures of time, unlike God who lives “above” time. Space: They cannot be everywhere at once (omnipresent). Power: Their power is limited by the sovereign power of God. Knowledge: Nor can they know everything, for only God is omniscient. Jesus said that the angels do not know when he would return in his second coming (Mark 13:32; cf. I Pet. 1:10-12). Don’t underestimate Satan’s knowledge—someone reminded me recently that the devil has a great memory; that is, has good “records” on what we most easily fall for ... But the devil has the limits of a creature; he is not God. Thus, I conclude that there are many things that Satan and his devils cannot know (as I said in a different connection in #4). As to the specific questions: “Does the devil know our thoughts, and does he know who are God’s elect?” because the Bible does not answer these questions explicitly, we should not be dogmatic about it. Perhaps here, too, the question distracts our attention from a more important matter: the devil does know who is making a Christian profession, who is living a godly life. This is the most important thing for him to know, for his desire is to dishonour God by assaulting that Christian faith and life. Second, what can the devil do regarding our hearts? ***Can he make suggestions to our thoughts? Can he plan in our subconsciousness?*** Let me answer this

by looking at what Satan has done. Satan “entered into” Judas (Luke 22:3). He “provoked” David to number Israel (I Chron. 21:1). Spiritually, he entered Judas—an unbeliever—to direct his thinking and willing. As to David (and other believers), the question is whether the devil can come *within* to plant thoughts, or is only able to use external means. The devil is spiritual. I do not doubt that he is able to plant evil thoughts in the minds and hearts of believers. He’s involved in our “greatest temptation” (see *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 16), in which we doubt our salvation and imagine we may be destined for hell.

7. *Abraham Kuyper said that every square inch of the world is Christ’s. Does that mean that Christ, by His death and resurrection, gained it back from the devil?*

Let’s leave Abraham Kuyper out of this for a moment (see below). As I said in the lecture, when man fell and *became guilty before God*, “the devil gained the right to the earthly creation, and to the human race” (I have it thus in my lecture manuscript). This is why the devil had the “power over death” (Heb. 2), could offer all the kingdoms of this world to Jesus (Matt. 4), had some access to heaven to “accuse the brethren” (Rev. 12), why II Corinthians 4:4 calls Satan the “god of this world” and why the creation was (and still is) subject to bondage (Rom. 8). Christ’s death on the cross paid for sin and redeemed men from death and guilt, and even redeemed creation, which awaits its final redemption (Rom. 8:23) when Christ returns. In that sense, Christ “gained [the creation] back from the devil.” Remember, though that the devil is not a god along-side of God, and that whatever the devil does and did is under God’s sovereign control. (Now, about “father Abraham.” Beware that Abraham Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist followers today repeat his “every square inch” expression—good in itself—in support of their wrong “kingdom” views and efforts at world transformation.)

8. *Why do they call it grim?*

“Grim” is the word in my lecture’s title, which is borrowed from the hymn that Martin Luther wrote, “A Mighty Fortress.” In that hymn, Luther writes, “The prince of darkness, grim, we tremble not for him ...” “Grim” is an adjective that simply means “fierce” or “savage.” So Luther meant, “even though the devil has a fierce and savage presence, we must not tremble before him.” Why not? “for lo, his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.”

9. *Could an exorcism performed according to protocol make problems worse?*

A great deal could be said about exorcisms here. In fact, the subject of exorcisms was the origin of the lecture. However, as I said in my introduction, the more I studied, the more I was convinced that to focus on exorcism would be a mistake that would play into the hand of the devil, because it would distract us from his main work. But having avoided that error, some more can be said about exorcisms. 1) First, in Acts 19:13-14 we read of “Jewish exorcists” who tried to practice the art (really “sorcery”) with Jesus’ name, and were made fools of in a story that’s almost funny if it weren’t so serious. The impression Luke leaves in Acts 19 is that exorcists were commonly known—there were *Jewish* exorcists in distinction from, one would imagine, *pagan* exorcists. With a certain spoken formula—the word “exorcist” refers to a spoken “oath”—these people would try to cast out devils. But these Jewish exorcists were not casting out devils according to God’s will. For more on that subject, see the interesting article in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (www.internationalstandardbible.com/E/exorcism-exorcist.html). The practice of Jesus and His disciples was far different from that of these other exorcists—Jewish and pagan. The word “exorcism” is not used to describe Jesus’ work. In Mark 1:22-28 and 32-34, the impression is clearly left that Jesus’ casting out of devils was a significantly different matter than these “exorcists.” 2) Now, the question about “exorcisms performed according to protocol” can be answered. “According to protocol” implies that there must be a certain formula and prescribed actions found in Scripture. But there are no such Scriptural formulas or actions. If God willed that the church today do such works, He would have given clear instruction for it in passages like Ephesians 6 where spiritual warfare is described or in the epistles where elders are instructed. Thus, “could an exorcism performed according to protocol make problems worse?” is answered by an emphatic “yes.” Let the devil be battled with the hard work of fervent prayer, the support of the family of faith in the communion of the saints and the long-term application of the Word of God.

10. *Did Satan change his tactics of physical occupation and destruction to that of spiritual occupation and destruction due to that same difference between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church?*

My own judgment, which you must test with Scripture: 1) Your question’s implied answer makes sense to me. 2) But don’t discount the reality that the devil, through men, engages in physical destruction today, too. Think of all the murders of abortion for which the devil is responsible. The devil delights in ruin, both physically and spiritually.

11. *If Satan knows God is sovereign, why does he keep trying to destroy God's people?*

The thrust of my lecture answered this question. Here is what my manuscript has: “**God** has a great purpose and aim—to **establish a kingdom for His own glory**. (a) His own Son will be King of the kingdom. (b) This kingdom will be peopled with citizens who serve and glorify him, by living according to His created order (!), and who use all of God's created works for that purpose. (c) It's a realm established in righteousness and truth, a kingdom that reveals the glory of God who made it, a kingdom whose citizens all recognize and confess the glory of the God who created it. We don't have time to show that from the Bible, but that's the theme that runs throughout Scripture. God created the worlds for his glory ... and a people who would recognize that glory and worship him by acknowledging that glory. So the Psalms—the book of Christian worship—resounds with this theme. Now the **Devil**, as the great adversary of God, wants to set up a **rival kingdom** of his own. But he does not want a kingdom alongside of God's kingdom, he wants God's own kingdom! He wants God's creation as his own, God's people as his followers, and the worship that is due to God given to him.” The devil is not like some Christians today who, with a skewed understanding of God's sovereignty, do nothing because, so they conclude, “God has it all determined and I can't change God's plan.”

12. *Is the goal of the devil still to have God's kingdom or to get as many of God's people to destruction as possible?* See II Thessalonians 2 and the whole book of Revelation. And the answer to question 11, above.

13. *Are heavenly “stars” the symbol of angels, such as 1/3 of them being swept out of the sky when Satan and the evil angels departed? What Scripture informs us of stars as symbols in this way?*

In Revelation 12, John received a vision of “signs” in heaven. The text tells us not to interpret the language literally, but figuratively or symbolically—*signs* in heaven. You must study this yourself, but I conclude that the woman represents (symbolizes or “*sign*”ifies) the church, the dragon represents the devil (see v. 9), and the stars all the angels. What right do we have to say that the stars represent angels? First, the logic of the passage, in light of the rest of the Scripture, points in this direction. Second, the Bible seems to refer to angels in terms of stars (Job calls angels “morning stars” in 38:7; cf. Isa. 14:12). This is the position of Wm. Hendriksen and Herman Hoeksema, although it is not the unanimous position of Reformed interpretation of the passage.

14. Can we, as humans, sense evil? We sense, or experience, the gift of the Holy Spirit—the joy that passes understanding. Can we then sense when evil comes close to us?

1) If “sensing when evil comes close” means some eerie feeling, a cold breeze blowing from nowhere or a thumping with no known source, my answer would be: “No, we can’t *sense* when evil comes close to us, any more than we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in these ways.” 2) But your question reminds me to caution us against mysticism, against living the Christian life according to feelings, against such an emphasis on feelings which are so difficult to interpret. At the same time, your rhetorical question begs an affirmative answer. Because the Bible and the Reformed confessions speak often about the Christian’s *feelings*, we may not ignore them, even if we must be very careful not to base judgments on them alone. Thus, I conclude: If God’s great works in us include comfort, joy, peace, love and righteous hatred, and if the Spirit of God works these gifts in us, the evil spirit will also work in ways that we “feel.” But let us caution ourselves to judge all our “feelings” and whatever we “sense” by objective standards of the Word of God. The devil is deceitful; so is my sinful flesh. The devil is able to make me “feel” like wrong is right.

15. Why is it that the Devil has more on his side that Christ has? Is this true?

Let me answer this in four parts: 1) As to numbers of *people* living at any one time, the Scripture indicates that the people on God’s side are in the minority, a little flock, as in the days of Noah; although the proportions may vary from generation to generation. 2) As to *devils and angels*, the number is fixed (cf. I Tim. 5:21); and if my understanding of Revelation 12 is correct (see #13), the number of angels is greater than the number of devils. 3) As to *power*, let no one question the sovereignty of God, the infinite greatness of God’s power, so that even the devil does only what God permits him to do. 4) As to what we *sense and experience*, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” (Read all of II Kings 6!)

16. Did you find benefits to reading Screwtape Letters?

Many Christians have found benefits from C.S. Lewis’s insights into the “psychology” of sin, human nature, and the biblical principles of battling sin. I would recommend his book to anyone who is interested in the subject, although it isn’t a scientific or doctrinal treatment of sin and Satan.

17. Do we have “guardian angels” or do the angels generally watch over God’s people?

The lecture was on Satan, but that subject certainly raises the question of angels. My judgment is that if Christians in my circles don't think about the devil enough, they think about angels even less. This is a mistake which would be corrected by reading the Bible more. The Old Testament speaks frequently about angels. Search the Scriptures to see. The Psalms promise care from angels. See Psalms 34 and 91 for illustrations of this; and remember the Psalms' applicability to New Testament Christians. The New Testament has angels announcing the birth of Jesus, ministering to Christ after His temptations, releasing Peter from prison, etc. Jesus said in Matthew 18:10, regarding "little ones," that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." As to the question of *personal*, guardian angels, John Calvin's deflection of the question is interesting: If I am not satisfied by the fact that the *whole heavenly host* is watching out for me, then it is not clear what benefit I would derive from knowing that *one* angel has been assigned as my personal guardian.

18. Do you think that the biggest temptation the devil puts in front of the church is busyness?

I always fear efforts to make anything the "biggest" or "worst" as it makes people argue about what else may be "bigger" or "worse," with the result that the main point is lost. Busyness often keeps us from doing what we ought to do or from prioritizing properly. Is busyness a tactic of the devil in your life? If so, battle it. But keep in mind all the other weapons the devil uses.

19. In I Samuel 28:10ff., just before Saul's death when he visited the witch or wizard, she was able to bring Samuel's spirit up. Was that the devil's work?

I was quite sure this question would come up. It may be a cop-out, but I'm going to ask that you study the commentaries on this passage and come to your own judgment. I have an opinion. I've studied the passage before and found it very difficult. Most orthodox and conservative commentators admit the difficulty. Some even admit that they cannot come to a conclusion. Let me know what you come up with.

20. The book of Revelation speaks of the Devil being loosed. Has this already happened or will it happen in the future? If so, how?

Revelation 20 speaks of the loosing of the devil. The passage shows that the devil is "bound" in one respect only: his ability to deceive the nations to unite into one great political power. Thus, at the end of the millennium when he is "loosed," he will be able to do what he could not do before: deceive the nations into uniting as one great political world-power. Prior to this, the devil was able to do a great deal. Has the devil been loosed already, so that he now is accomplishing what he

could not do for 2,000 years? Let us watch and be sober. Let us be aware of what happens in the world today. *How* was/will the devil be loosed? I know of nothing in Scripture that answers that question.

21. Was the creation of Lucifer all part of God's plan of redemption? (fitting with that question is this one: **Why did God create man and 1/3 of angels destined to fail? If God created creation [and all therein] perfect, why did it fail? Did God fail?)**

We must be careful speaking of the "creation" of Lucifer, since everything that God created was "good," including all the angels. Lucifer (if we believe Isaiah 14:12 is speaking of the devil; and I do) became evil by his fall. With that qualification, the question can be answered in the affirmative. Everything that takes place is a part of God's "perfect plan." This is why I love the Reformed teaching in Lord's Day 10 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: "What dost thou mean by the providence of God? The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand." Then, study these passages, in this order: Colossians 1:15-16, Proverbs 16:4, Isaiah 45:7, Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:28. Then re-read Colossians 1:15-16, emphasizing the prepositions "by" and "for." God is God. He is wise. He's good. If you still have problems with the sovereignty of God, pray for the ability to embrace the truth that Nebuchadnezzar confessed in Daniel 4:35. With greatest care and humility, and without attributing any evil to God, we confess His absolute sovereignty over all things, even over sin and sinful men.

22. Is it possible that angels now in this present time fall from "grace"?

I Timothy 5:21 speaks of elect angels, which means they cannot fall from grace. Just as an elect Christian cannot fall (permanently!) from grace and perish, angels cannot.

23. May we say, when we sin, "It was the devil that made me sin" or do we say it was our sinful nature? Or is this the same thing? Both, though regarding the former statement we would add that the devil "tempted" me to sin and I wickedly yielded. Can you distinguish between the old man of sin and the work of Satan? Yes. My old man of sin is I myself. I may not say that I am the devil. My old man of sin is devilish. But it is not the devil.

24. *Is the power to do miracles restrained in Satan right now or is it a strategic move on his part to wait until the antichristian kingdom is developed?*

1) For Satan being restrained or “loosed,” see #20. God does restrain the devil, as He did in Job’s life. How He does that in particular instances today is not revealed to us. 2) As to your alternative proposal, Satan is no one’s fool, and will act and refrain from acting with devilishly “wise” strategies. Let us *not* underestimate his craft and cunning or all the abilities he and his underlings have.