

EXPERT-LEVEL DEVIL



"...so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

2 CORINTHIANS 2:11





SCHEMES

- The scriptures are clear in their assessment of the devil. He is described as an adversary (1 Peter 5:8) who rather obviously and boisterously “roars like a lion, seeking someone to devour.” He might be found “prowling” in dark shadows, but the astute person of faith shouldn’t be surprised.
- The devil is a “liar from the beginning” (John 8:44), a callback to the first of his innumerable schemes. Genesis 3 essentially sets the model for all future sins and accompanying temptations.
- While it is true that the devil disguises himself (2 Corinthians 11:14), his means of promotion are not secret. Sin is obvious – it is greed, lust, rebellion, etc. It is basic and straightforward in its essence (1 John 3:10). “Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious...” (Galatians 5:19).

SO WHAT MAKES HIM SUCH AN *EXPERT*?



- What shocks me is not how innovative or revolutionary he is. After all, he's just recycling old material (Ecc. 1:9-11). What is most shocking is how easily we fall for the same traps, over and over again. The devil is an expert because he knows how to employ tried-and-true methods, leading to amazing and consistent results. "If it ain't broke..."
- Like people lining up for products they know are unhealthy or hapless and gullible victims of a scam, we accept the same lies about sin that the devil has been using from the beginning.
- He is an expert because he knows his stuff (John 8:44).
- He is an expert because he is desperate (Matt. 25:41, Rev. 20:7-10)

THE PITCH IS ALWAYS *CUSTOM-MADE*

- The devil has a way with finding everybody's weak spot. What works for one person isn't what works for everybody. The weak spot might also change over a lifetime, where the sins of our youth evolve into very different temptations later.
- Satan appealed very carefully to Eve's sense of "missing out." To Cain, God said, "Sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for *you*" (Genesis 4:7). Jesus warned Peter that the devil had strategically targeted him (Luke 22:31-34).
- It's not that sin itself is novel. It's that the devil makes us think our circumstance is special – that you will be able to handle that lie, that addiction won't impact you, that you can "have it all", that "she won't find out", that it really is "true love this time", that a little more won't hurt, that nobody else understands... Remember Galatians 6:7.

This is all true on an individual level, as well as

A CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL



WE ALL KNOW WHAT WORKS



- "Do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27). "Make no provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). "Resist the devil" (1 Pet. 5:9, James 4:7ff). "Stand firm" against his schemes (Eph. 6:11). So what keeps working in many churches?
- Disunity, biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15).
- Mortgaging our influence to pay for our standing.
- Superficial differences taking on an ugly life of their own – ageism, racism, "us vs. them" language, wealth or position, "perfect families" vs. everybody else.
- Lust, adultery, pornography (and allowing silence to feast on awkwardness).
- Gossip, the juicier the better, and other kinds of manipulative speech (Prov. 26:21-25, 27:6, 18:2, 18:4, 18:6-8, Col. 3:8-9, Eph. 4:29).

More than anything else, all of these tactics are a smokescreen. They take our focus off the mission of Christ. We become the church trying not to lose members. We become the church trying to preserve peace and quiet. We become the church of budgets and business meetings, that never budgets any time for the Lord's business. We become spectators. We become each other's enemies, while ignoring the enemy behind all the pain, suffering, and vexation.



HOW TO RESIST

- **KNOW WHEN TO RUN** – There is a time to put up a fight against the devil, and a time to run. “Flee from sin” (1 Tim. 6:11-12, 2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14). Know your limits and weaknesses. You can’t just muscle your way through sin.
- **TURN THE DEVIL’S OPPORTUNITIES INTO YOUR OWN** – Paul placed the blame for his thorn in the side on the devil (2 Cor. 12:7). But the very tool Satan thought would impede the apostle became a device for experiencing humility and reliance on the grace of Christ.
- **BE OPEN TO HARD CRITICISM** – God places people in our lives who can hold us accountable (Gal. 2:14). Parents, elders, older Christians, even our own innocent children! We must stop getting defensive and break down our walls. Let harsh words sink in and be open to change (Proverbs 27:5-6, 12:1, 28:23, 9:7-12).
- **TAKE A STAND... THEN ANOTHER** – Finally say, “Begone, Satan!” One victory usually leads to another, which helps establish consistency (James 4:7).