How does the devil (& the demonic) ‘attack’ us?

Have you ever noticed that some Christians seem to blame any problem or difficulty that arises in their life on satan? Car breaks down, traffic makes them late, person gets hurt, computer has problems, not enough money at the end of the month, they are feeling sad – it is all an attack from satan. “Please pray for me, I’m under attack from satan.” Are they? Wouldn’t it be great to know?

Other Christians just roll their eyes whenever someone talks about the devil or the demonic. They understand temptations from our culture, but the idea that satan and the demonic are actively working to stop people from witnessing, regularly serving Jesus or going to church just seems unreal to them. “Don’t people just use satan as an excuse for natural problems, sickness and their own laziness?” Yet Jesus faced powerful attacks by satan right from the start of His ministry. Wouldn’t it be great to better understand how satan and the demonic attack the normal Christian in their lives here on earth?

We are going to try to give you a foundation to work with today. Then next Sunday, we will follow today up with how satan tempted Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Let’s start with Ephesians 6:11. READ. The devil & the demons are real and active around us. There is a real spiritual battle going on around us. God has given us armor – He has given us spiritual weapons – so we can “stand”. Standing – that is remaining in the faith, resisting the devil, sharing the good news of Jesus with others, sticking up for Jesus, not giving up on God – that is spiritual victory for you and I. It is not our jobs to crush satan, put the demonic under our heels or take over all the countries of the world. We are to stand against the devil’s schemes. Now a scheme is a plan or program of action to get something someone wants, that often involving underhanded, illegal, wrong or immoral aspects. The schemes spoken of here are underhanded plots, full of intrigue, secret & dishonest plans that are trying to get us to do what we shouldn’t do or not do what we should do?

Where did Paul, his fellow missionaries and the early church get their confident knowledge of satan’s schemes? The vast majority of the New Testament hasn’t been written yet and when it is finished there aren’t any lists of the devil’s schemes listed in it. Jesus’ teaching will refer to satan and the demonic but no where do we have an extensive list of the devil’s schemes. Paul and the others got their knowledge of how satan & the demonic work, what tricks they use, & how they try to cause Christians to fall instead of stand from the Old Testament. What’s most fascinating is that there are only 4 places in the whole Old Testament where satan interacts with a human. ONLY FOUR! Each one is very different. These 4 passages clearly show us 4 of the most common and effective schemes the devil & the demonic use to try to get us to fall. By knowing these 4 schemes, we can better resist their evil intent and stand firm in faith. Turn to Genesis 3. The very first place that satan interacts with humans is in the first book of the Bible – the book of Genesis.
PROPOSITION: By knowing the four primary ways the devil & the demonic scheme against us, we can better stand victorious in God’s sight & use/see the value of God’s power, armor and protection despite our feelings, outward circumstances or pressure from other people.

How does the devil (& the demonic) ‘attack us? What are their schemes? Ephesians 6:11

I. By tempting us to do wrong

A. Scheme #1: ENTICE (deceptive appeal to our desires) & make claims there are NO MAJOR CONSEQUENCES to disobey God

So how does the devil (and the demonic) ‘attack us’? What are these 4 schemes of the demonic? The first scheme is to tempt us to do wrong by making that wrong look harmless & good. Here in the Garden of Eden the devil takes on the form of a serpent and tries to get Adam & Eve to do the one thing God asked them not to do. READ Gen 3:1-5. Previous to this God had created Adam, then Eve. The the Lord put these first two humans in paradise – the Garden of Eden. God gave them just 1 boundary – don’t eat the fruit of a particular tree called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. God clearly told them the consequences of disobedience would be awful – they would die. God didn’t explain more - they had to believe & trust Him as their God AS they fully enjoyed all the rest of creation, a positive relationship with their Creator & positive relationships with each other. It is a tough life, but someone has to do it! 😄

That’s where satan steps in, taking the form of a serpent. READ v 1b “Did God really say, ‘you must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” satan tries to create doubt in the goodness & wisdom of God so we will disobey willingly. READ v 4-5. “Nothing bad is going to happen, in fact you’ll gain so much.” Did that turn out to be true? Absolutely not! What came was incredible pain, broken relationships, heartache and sure death. All humans now have a sin nature which we willingly choose to act on, separating us from God (spiritual death) and facing sure physical death.

So satan’s first type of attack is to encourage us to disobey a clear command of God’s. (That command could be negative like it is here, “Don’t do something” or it could be positive like “Do stand for Jesus”). The devil’s plan is to entice our desires. The demonic tries to make disobedience look good. satan promises pleasure or good things through disobedience. THEN they try to reassure people that no harm will come from their disobedience – “what’s the harm – no one will get hurt – everybody is doing it.” This is by far the top scheme of satan and the demonic against Americans today. satan wants us to go by our feelings at the moment instead of the commands & principles of God. READ v 6. Don’t choose your actions by feelings or desires or seemingly immediate returns – live by a higher standard – live by faith!

B. Undermines God’s ways – His commands, wisdom & absolute truth

In this first type of attack, satan is trying to undermine the wisdom and truth of God – His ways and His commands!
C. Some examples
This attack is quite common in everyday life. It comes out of ads trying to get us to covet what we don’t have because they claim we won’t be happy without it. So countless Americans are in deep credit card debt that is enslaving them because they fell for satan’s lie that more things will make you happy AND no harm will come by getting what you deserve. Whether it is being tempted to have sex outside of marriage, lying so we won’t be embarrassed, neglecting our regular service for Jesus because we want to entertain ourselves or justifying our hatred of others, IF WE go by our feelings & disobey God, satan has outwitted us and bad consequences are coming. This is the first kind of temptation we need to recognize and not give in to. I think this temptation is easy to understand, but let’s go one step further to help us understand this temptation emotionally.

D. What does victory look like?
So what does victory look like? How would Adam and Eve have felt if they didn’t give in to satan’s scheme? At the moment of victory, it would have felt like a big sacrifice! To be victorious over this scheme of satan, we must deny ourselves something that is being offered. We have to remember that short term this victory will feel bad or feel like we are giving up something. But long term we will rejoice again and again! When we obey, we honor Jesus who richly rewards.

In 8th grade, I finally gave in to peer pressure and got high on drugs. “What could it hurt? Look at what you are missing. Nothing bad is going to happen”, they kept saying. I was being tempted to disobey God who tells us never to get drunk on alcohol or high on drugs. I was told all this good would come and assured no harm would come. This kind of attack of satan is meant to get us off track and then enslave us if we keep going in it. This scheme is trying to get back at God by having us disobey. This time, God graciously showed me how foolish I was, so I repented and turned away from any drugs. Fast forward 5 years later to my freshman year at University. Some of my dorm mates constantly pressured me to get high or drunk. Look at what you are missing! This time I relied on the Bible’s truth instead of my feelings. “Yup, I’m going to miss a headache & hangover tomorrow, I’m going to miss regrets from words & actions I don’t remember, I’m going to miss relationships being messed up.” I sacrificed a present desire to the Lord, and ended up being protected long term from many negative consequences. And I gained so many more positives.

II. By intimidating us through pain or problems
So how does the devil (and the demonic) attack us? What are these 4 schemes of the demonic? Scheme #1: satan will try to entice us by our feelings to do something God disapproves of. It will feel good initially to give in. To be successful, we’ll actually feel a temporary loss but we’ll gain so much long term.

A. Scheme #2: INTIMIDATE (raising fear to make us ineffective)
The second place in the Old Testament that satan interacts with a human is in the book of Job chapters 1 & 2. TURN THERE. It is a long section, so I will just summarize most of it and encourage you to read the whole two chapters later this week. Here satan attacks the godly man Job by destroying his savings, terminating his jobs, destroying his possessions and killing his kids. satan is trying to intimidate Job so he stops loving, serving and obeying God. When that doesn’t work, satan then strikes Job with painful, incurable boil. satan uses physical pain to try to turn Job away from God. In this second attack, satan uses fear, intimidation or bad circumstances to try to make us ineffective. satan is trying to bully God’s people so we will either give up on God in some way.

B. Undermines God’s power & sovereignty
   It is important to remember that none of satan’s attacks are about us — but they are about undermining God & His glory. This second attack undermines God’s power & sovereignty. “God, You could have done something but You didn’t.” Why aren’t you rescuing me or protecting me more?

C. Some examples
   Can you think of any ways that Christians are facing intimidation today that makes them want to back down from witnessing or publicly standing for Jesus? What happens today if you stand for marriage as one man & one woman for life? Or that homosexual sex is the same disobedience as pre-marital sex or adultery? Or that God created 2 genders, male & female which are seen biologically in the DNA of every cell in every person’s body? You are called a hate-filled, ignorant, bigot. That intimidation is trying to get you & I to back down and be quiet.

   We pray almost every week for the persecuted church because satan is trying to use the pain & threats of persecution to intimidate believers to be silent about their faith. Many American Christians have felt a similar temptation not to share their faith because they don’t want their family or social group to think badly about them. Another way satan uses this attack is to bring problems and pain into our lives so we are kept from church or step back from serving Jesus or just want to give up on faith. Do you really believe all those hassles before church on Sunday are just happening? Sometimes there is an instigator behind them trying to intimidate you or I to quit. Hear me clearly — if problems come into our lives, it usually is NOT an attack of satan — those problems are just a part of being in a broken world & being broken people. So things that make our lives more difficult are not attacks of satan — you and I are not his main focus, opposing God is. So it is primarily when those problems and/or pain come into our lives AND tempt us to give up loving or serving God that the attack could be from the devil or the demonic.

D. What does victory look like?
   So what does victory look like? It is to simply stand. It is to continue in our spiritual activity, faith, witness, whatever. It is to not give up on Jesus even though our faith
may be hanging by the tiniest thread. Notice what victory looked like for Job. **READ Job 1:20-22.** There are no victorious feelings for Job, nor any confidence what will come in the future. Anyone hearing this tale on the outside would mourn — Job has just lost more than any of us can imagine! Victory is to not let the obstacles stop us. It is to worship in hard times as well as good times like Job did. It is to find that which we can be thankful for even though our minds constantly go back to how bad our situation is. It is to show love in relationships when little is being shown back. At the time of victory in this attack, you **will feel** overwhelmed, intimidated, and wanting to just run away or give up. That is not a lack of faith. Because with even the smallest exercise of faith (just standing) something starts changing inside you. A different attitude arises, **"I don’t care what you bring satan, I’m not backing down."** When I see the smallest evidence of this in someone’s life in the worst situations, I know the devil & demonic have already been defeated. Their schemes have not worked — their deception has not misled. But when I see people constantly complaining, griping, blaming others and letting little things keep them from God’s work then I know they have already given in to this attack. It is very important **NOT** to give in to this fear but simply stand. When we do give into intimidation from our spiritual enemies we put a neon sign over our head that says, **"if I ever start to do anything significant for God, just bring this fear, pain or problem into my life and I will back off & go back to mediocrity."** Ouch! I know I have done that. When we overcome intimidation, we find significance in the long run and we also face fewer of those specific attacks down the road!

**III. By inciting our sinful pride**

**I Chronicles 21:1-8**

So how does the devil (and the demonic) ‘attack us’? What are these 4 schemes of the demonic?

- The first way satan attacks is by **temptation**; he entices our feelings; he tries to deceive us to do something displeasing to God, then tell us there are no negative consequences. It won’t “feel” like an attack, but it will feel very desirable. It can be in a time of need where we are tempted to do wrong to solve a problem or it can be in a time of plenty where we simply want more of something.

- The second way satan attacks is by **intimidation**. The demonic bring opposition, problems and pain into our lives so we will back off doing any Jesus thing. This is what we usually think of when we say we are under attack from the devil. Everything seems to be going wrong around us and we get overwhelmed.

A. **Scheme #3: INCITE SINFUL PRIDE** (provoking our self-focus)

But what about the times when everything is going right and we seem to be strong in our faith in Jesus. The third scheme is one that the devil & the demonic have found very effective in these times. **Turn to I Chronicles 21:1-8.** When things are going great in the life of a Christian, satan tries to incite our sinful pride by having us believe WE must really be someone great and special. They are trying to get us to
temporarily forget our dependence on God and think whatever we want to do must be OK because everything is going so great.

After a tough start under King Saul and then many years trying to unify the nation again, the situation has **finally** turned around. There are victories all over the place, unity in the nation, wealth is expanding, and peace starting — even with the Philistines who seemed so unbeatable for hundreds of years. At the height of King David’s power, I Chron 21:1 says, “satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.” In v 3, even his “less religious” top general knew this was bad in God’s eyes and would bring great guilt on the country. The devil and the demonic want to trigger sinful pride in our lives.

**B. Undermines God’s rule in our life**

Sinful pride always undermines God’s righteous rule in our life. In pride, we insist we are the ones in control of our lives and we get to determine what is right and wrong.

- Some say “I don’t need the church – it is just me and Jesus” (that’s sinful pride egged on by satan and heading for a bad crash).
- Others say, “I know God will accept everyone regardless of what they believe” (that’s sinful pride – who are we to say that?).
- A number say “It’s bigoted to say Jesus is the only way – all religions are equally good” (that’s sinful pride – the people saying it think they know more than the dedicated followers of each of those religions, let alone God! Many have never even taken time to actually compare the religions).
- Others say, “I’m a good person; I do lots of good things – of course I am going to heaven” (that’s sinful pride & the demonic are really rejoicing of how effective that attack is in Western culture. We are all sinners unworthy of heaven)

When a Christian lets sinful pride rise up in their life, they start making foolish decisions that really mess up their life. You may have heard the phrase, “Pride comes before the fall”. That is actually the combination of two different pieces of Proverbs 16:18. It is when things are going good, when the pressure is off and we are NOT struggling — that we are most tempted to make foolish prideful decisions that hurt relationships, inflate our ego, ignore God’s warnings, think our thoughts are the Holy Spirit’s voice, or rationalize scripture!

**C. Some examples**

**D. What does victory look like?**

So what does victory look like? **Victory is true Biblical humility.** We are neither puffed up nor continually down on ourselves. We overflow with thanks to God; we recognize the help of others; we seek ways to sacrifice to advance God’s work in this world; and we just have this sense of gratefulness. **This is the most pleasant of all the victories.** For the truly humble believer, this attack often just bounces off their
back without them even knowing they were attacked. For the rest of us, it can feel like quite a struggle until we let go of our sinful pride and embrace thankfulness, contentment & appreciation of God’s grace instead.

IV. By accusing us

- What is the first way satan attacks? **Temptation**; he entices our feelings to do something displeasing to God, then tell us there are no negatives.
- What is the second way satan attacks? **Intimidation**; he brings opposition, problems and pain into our lives so we will back off some aspect of following, witnessing for, worshipping or serving Jesus.
- What is the third way satan attacks? he incites pride & self-focus especially when things go good.

A. Scheme #4: ACCUSATION (stirring up our shame)

('satan' is the Hebrew word meaning ‘accuser’ or ‘adversary’)

**Turn to Zechariah 3** - 2nd to last book of the Old Testament & on pg 949 in the black Bibles. The fourth time satan interacts with a human in the Old Testament is the least known to Americans BUT it is what satan’s name means. In Zechariah 3, we are brought into the throne room of heaven. **READ v 1.** Literally ‘satan is sataning’ – satan, the adversary, is sataning – that is accusing, satan doesn’t have to lie – he simply points to real wrong things we have thought or done. Look at **v 3. READ.** Those filthy clothes represent sin in Joshua’s life. Joshua was the high priest who came back with Zerrubabel to help teach God’s ways to the remnant and re-establish godly worship at the temple after 70 years of none. The Hebrew people are politically weak, financially poor and oppressed. Joshua is pouring out everything he has to serve God – but he isn’t perfect – there is real sin in his life as there is in every one of us here, especially me. In carrying out his priestly duty, Joshua is standing before God to bring sacrifices for his people and satan is accusing Joshua so God won’t accept those sacrifices for Joshua or the people. Joshua remains silent because he knows even with his best effort falls short of God’s holiness. It is the Lord who steps forward to answer these accusations. **READ v 2.** The Lord doesn’t say Joshua’s sin is no big deal or that his good covers the bad. Look at **v 4. READ.** The Lord provides the sacrifice, forgives Joshua’s sin and puts His righteousness on Joshua – which is pictured in the clean garments. In this attack, satan is trying to undermine God’s grace & mercy.

B. Undermines God’s grace & mercy

C. Some examples

How does this accusation attack look to us in everyday life? It is actually something many of us feel, but we don’t recognize it as an attack. You are praying, worshiping, witnessing or serving Jesus and you start to feel you are no good for God or anyone else. That is either unconfessed sin, sinful pride refusing to receive God’s grace after repentance or this fourth attack of satan. It is where we want to hide away from life and others when a past sin that we’ve confessed is brought up. Instead of saying,
We may deny, change the subject, attack back or withdraw in depression. This attack is encouraging that unbiblical statement, “God could never forgive me for what I did.” Remember the accusations will be about real things we think or do. And sinful pride is closely aligned here because when we feel these accusations, our old nature wants to respond with sinful pride instead of humble confidence.

D. What does victory look like?

What does victory look like? Spiritual inner brokenness, which stands naked before Jesus! “Yes I have done that”. Joshua was already in a humble, repentant attitude coming in with the sacrifice for the people. If we try to fight those accusations with our arguments – like it is no big deal or give rationalizations why it wasn’t our fault or try to build our self-value or say ‘Jesus accepts whatever I do because of love’ -- we have already lost that battle – we have been defeated by satan’s attack because sinful pride has taken over and we just saw its problem. Yes, the ugliness of our sin is real – whether it is current or years ago. Victory comes as we just stand in God’s presence with a humble, repentant spirit. Jesus then raises us up, rebukes satan & makes us clean in God’s sight! As James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.” It is all done by God – it is not something we deserve nor can we earn it. But we must receive God’s free gift. We can tell if we have done this, because we will seek to obey Jesus more, be more thankful, and put more effort into spiritual things. If we hide away in embarrassment, get angry because people brought it up, mope around or wallow in self-pity then we have been defeated by satan’s satanizing and we have let sinful pride keep us from receiving God’s free grace.

4 very effective schemes the devil and demonic use. May God open your eyes and my eyes to recognize these more quickly and simply stand against them. Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus.