

WHO IS IN CHARGE?

By

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In spite of the clear statement of Jesus that He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), and in spite of the many scriptures that affirm that Jesus reigns “above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion” (Eph. 1:20-21), it is still said by many that this world is under the power and control of Satan.

There are a number of terms in scripture which all refer to the same entity: devil, deceiver, Satan, serpent, dragon, and adversary. He is said to be able to tempt, lie, deceive, oppress, and even perform “signs and lying wonders,” but he himself is subject to the power of God. Satan was allowed to afflict Job only after God gave permission, and even then he was limited as to how far he could go (Job 1:12, 21:6). Satan had to ask Jesus for permission to tempt Peter (Luke 22:31). Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered to Satan by the apostle Paul, that they might be taught a lesson (1 Tim. 2:20). Paul delivered the incestuous member of the Corinthian church to Satan to bring him to repentance (1 Cor. 4:5). In each case Satan had no power of his own, but was used for God’s purpose.

Satan is under Christ’s control. He is not a dog without a leash, but is accountable to Jesus who has all power. Satan is not an immortal being (only Jesus has immortality. 1 Tim 6:16). And in the end will be judged and destroyed.

Paul writes that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving” (2 Cor. 4:4), not suggesting that Satan is the supernatural ruler of the world, as some think, but only that he is god to the wicked who serve him. The term is used in the same sense as in Philippians 3:19, where the apostle writes of those “whose god is the belly.” One’s belly becomes his god when he allows his appetite to prevail over him.

While Satan can deceive and tempt, it is only when the human mind decides to respond that sin is committed. Furthermore, the tempter has no power to force submission to the temptation. “There has no temptation taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

John wrote that “We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the evil one” (John 5:19). This is simply a contrast between believers who seek righteousness and unbelievers who sin without remorse. It says nothing of Satan’s power, only that the world follows his leading.

The world is filled with lies, deceit, false teaching, brainwashing and sinful desires. Public schools are largely under the control of the NEA which openly advocates the elimination of religious faith (which it calls superstition); the news media is openly

antagonistic to Christ and Christians, as seen in its promotion of the blasphemy called “The Jesus Seminars;” the government is filled with people whose religious views are diametrically opposed to Christ. The Supreme Court recently made a ruling which extends special privileges to homosexuals, whose practice God calls an abominable sin.

All of this evil is voluntary. Paul wrote that “to whom you present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants you are whom you obey” (Rom. 6:16). To yield our minds to Satan is to give him power in our lives. Horrible crimes are committed by people who first begin to read about them, then view them on television or in the movies, until finally they become captive to their own evil thoughts and commit the crime themselves. It is in this sense that Satan becomes their god, not that he has power over the world but that people in rebellion against the king receive Satan’s lies and willfully act upon them.

The world of Paul’s day was filled with civil and violence. And many compare what is going on in America with what was taking place in the Roman Empire under Nero during Paul’s ministry. The administration in Rome was rife with shocking scandals, murder and sexual immorality. Christians were not safe anywhere and many were being martyred. Add to this the false doctrines from pagan concepts that had been intermingled with the revealed truth and it appeared that Satan was in charge and that the faith was not going to survive.

The solution was not for Christians to live in fear of what the future might hold. Neither were they to find some hide-a-way and live secluded from the world as “survivors.” Rather they were to be aggressive in the warfare against evil, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

One of the most amazing works of God and the greatest blessing He has bestowed upon man was to create him with a mind which enables man to think the thoughts of God and to have a mind-to-mind relationship with the Creator. It is this mind-to-mind fellowship God desires with His creatures. Not mere ritual. Not merely filling the pew at a religious service. God scathingly rebuked those who were punctual in religious acts, such as sacrifices and offerings, without having their minds fixed on Him. Jesus warned against repetitious words and public displays of religious forms. Instead, He insisted that we learn of Him. Our minds are to be fixed on His truth, not Satan’s lies.

The power to sin doesn’t come from Satan, but is within each of us. James writes that “each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). The remedy is to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Paul advises us how to do this: “Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For you died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with him be manifested in glory” (Col 3:1-4).

How can one fix his mind on the things of Christ when there is such pressure from the world around us? The answer is in the phrase. “for you died.” Jesus expressed it. “if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Denying self means obeying Christ without regard to the cost, without concern for embarrassment or loss of men’s esteem, without fear of what people will think, and with only one concern: whether or not it pleases Christ.

This is the very opposite of the current promotion of “self esteem” among young people, which causes one to focus on himself: “I’m somebody special, I’m important, I’m self-sufficient, I’m good, God loves me just as I am, I’m proud of myself, etc.” This attitude takes one’s mind off of Christ, in whom our lives are to be “hid.” It produces arrogance and pride instead of the humility which is necessary to self-denial and obedience to Jesus.

Fear of Satan is overcome by faith that Christ is our sovereign Lord and King. We are in a great spiritual conflict “against the spiritual hosts of wickedness,” but Christ the King is on our side, so we can “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might,” wearing the armor of God. That armor includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit (God’s word) and the shield of faith (Eph. 6:10-16). With this shield, Paul writes, “you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Vs.16).

Satan has duped the world into believing a myriad of lies, one of which is that the world is under his power and control. This is one of his best tools in bringing people under his influence, but it is a lie, and each time it is repeated it dishonors Jesus Who is at the right hand of God with all power and authority. However persuasive Satan’s tempting may be; he has no power to compel you to give in. James says: “Submit to God, but resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). We resist the devil by submitting to God, and the devil is powerless to keep one from obeying God.

It is Jesus Who was raised from death and exalted to the place “far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion” (Eph. 1:21), and it is He through whom the Father will judge the world at the last day (Acts 7:31). The devil, along with all who submit to him, will then see just Who is in charge.

Jesus is Lord!

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