

The Conquering Christ

Message 8

Satan's Counterfeits

Revelation 13:1-18

Satan's Strategy

Did Satan get to you last week? Did he try? Would you know if Satan tried to harm you? How would you know? I do not mean to give the wrong impression. Satan is a finite creature. He can do only what God permits him to do. He can only be in one place at a time. So if Satan was after you Monday morning, he was not after me, or anyone else on earth. But he does have demons who assist him, so they can share the work. Nevertheless, it is wrong to think that there is a demon under every bush. It is also wrong to think that every problem is directly caused by Satan or his helpers. This world has enough evil in it to cause us trouble without Satan's direct influence. And by far the most significant source of our struggles is the sin that inhabits our flesh. But having made due allowance for the greater influence of the world and our flesh, Satan is still a source of trouble for Christians.

If this is the case, we need to know what Satan is up to so we can be on our guard. Let us remember, Satan is not someone to be feared. God controls Satan, Jesus defeated him on the cross, and the Holy Spirit in you is stronger than Satan. If Satan is armed with an assault rifle, you are armed with a nuclear bomb. The issue is not allowing yourself to be tricked or ambushed by Satan – because he is extremely intelligent and diabolically clever. In 2 Corinthians 2:11 Paul said, "...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs." Are you ignorant of Satan's designs? If so, let us begin learning about his strategies so that we will not be blind-sided by his attacks. Revelation is a goldmine of information about Satan and his plots. As we proceed we will discover that he has three primary strategies: intimidation, confusion, and seduction. This week we will discuss his efforts to intimidate and confuse us. When we get to chapter 17, we will discuss how he seduces us.

Chapters six to eleven outlined the events of the end by a series of seven seals opened and seven trumpet warnings. Now we are focusing on some details of these events, and we are taking a closer look at the characters involved. Last week we met the glorious woman and the dragon. Soon we shall meet another beautiful woman and the knight in shining armor. This week we shall meet two additional beasts.

Last week we saw that the glorious woman is the people of God. Before Jesus came she was known as Israel. Since Jesus she is known as the church. Although wracked by sin, tormented by the world, and pursued by Satan, she is still a glorious woman. In spite of her weakness, failure, and ugliness, God loves her and sees her true beauty. When you see the church with earthly eyes you are not impressed. When you see the church through God's eyes, you fall in love with her. God even chose to send His beloved Son into the world through the church.

Last week we also met a great red dragon, a magnificent creature. Revelation 12 reveals that the glorious woman bore a child who would rule the nations. The dragon tried to eat the child, but he failed. The child rose to heaven, threw out the dragon, and now rules the earth. The dragon was enraged, and attacked the woman. But God protected the woman by carrying her into the wilderness where he fed her in safety. The dragon failed again! Now more enraged than ever, he turned to attack her children. Chapter 12 identified the dragon as Satan, the devil, the ancient serpent who tempted Eve and always attacks and accuses God's people. This week we will see how Satan does this.

The Beast from the Sea

Satan failed to kill Jesus, he failed to keep his place in heaven, and he failed in his initial attack on the church. Now he takes a new approach. He initiates a three part strategy to destroy the church. For each

part of his strategy he enlists the aid of a helper. Chapter 13 opens with Satan calling forth a hideous beast from the sea. This beast has seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns. If you have been paying attention you will notice that you have seen this description before. Sure enough, in chapter 12 the dragon was described as having seven heads, ten horns, and crowns. But in spite of the amazing similarity in appearance, these are not the same creatures. One is consistently called the dragon, and the other is consistently called the beast. The dragon's crowns are on its heads, while the beast's crowns are on its horns. Most obviously, the dragon calls forth the beast. They are two distinct beings.

The beast is hideous. John must have cried out in terror when he saw it coming. It has the combined terrifying features of the horrible beasts in the visions in the book of Daniel. It has the unmatched speed of a leopard, a the brute strength of a bear, and the ability of a lion to tear its prey to shreds. The beast is demonic. It wears a blasphemous name on each of its seven heads. It possesses incredible power and authority which it receives from the dragon. The whole earth is amazed at this beast. Everyone worships it saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" By now you should be able to identify the beast. Remember, the sea is the symbol for the gentiles – so this is a gentile power. Which gentiles in the first century possessed massive power? Who had the invincible armies? Who was worshiped all over the world? Rome, of course.

This passage calls attention to three characteristics of Rome. First is its overwhelming power. No one opposed Rome and survived. A random barbarian tribe might win a victory here or there, but Rome never forgot and never gave up. Eventually she returned and crushed any opposition. This is the reason Rome was worshiped. People worshiped Rome out of fear of her power, but also in gratitude for her protection. However cruel and ruthless Rome was, life in the empire was better than life anywhere else. People loved the protection and prosperity that always came with Roman rule.

Second, Rome was demonic. You probably have read the Graeco-Roman myths. They are good stories, aren't they? But what we tend to overlook is that they are blasphemous. They ascribe to idols the glory due to God alone. These myths did not arise out of nothing. They were inspired by Satan as a way to rob God of his glory. Whatever beauty and wisdom you may find in pagan religion, its origin and nature is demonic. In addition, by the middle of the first century emperor worship was in full swing. Augustus declared Julius Caesar divine after his death. Of course this made Augustus, his son, the son of a god. Nero took this process one step further and declared himself a god. Rome was hideously blasphemous all the way through.

Third, Rome persecuted the church. This was not true at first. Christian persecution in the first couple of centuries after Christ came from the Jews. They viewed Christians as heretics. Saul is the most famous Jewish persecutor. He obtained official papers permitting him to travel to Damascus and arrest and imprison any Christians he found there. At first Rome viewed Christians as a sect of Judaism, which was a protected religion. But as Christianity spread and became widespread among gentiles – and as emperor worship also spread in the empire – an inevitable collision was set up. By Nero's reign, refusal to worship the emperor was considered treason. For the next three centuries there would be continual war between church and empire.

Satan's first strategy to destroy the church was intimidation. By bringing the power of Rome against the church Satan hoped to frighten and entice the church into abandoning her Lord. Compared to the alternatives, life in the empire was good. There was general peace and prosperity. Who would not wish to live there? And all you needed to do was offer a little incense to the genius of Caesar. Such a small thing. It does not mean much, really. And after all, Caesar really is Lord of the empire, isn't he? But Jesus claims exclusive Lordship. You should honor and obey your king, president, governor, and mayor – but worship belongs to Jesus alone. Christians in all ages refuse to worship Caesar – whoever he may be – and they will

die for their loyalty to Jesus.

Although Revelation addresses a first century problem, the issues are by no means limited to the first century. I hope you can see the obvious parallels between Rome and the United States. For all of its very real problems, there is no place on earth where peace and prosperity are so widespread and easy to access as the United States. And we are an unrivaled military power. We can crush any other country or alliance of countries if we choose. Consequently people simultaneously hate us and lust after us – just as they did to ancient Rome. But, you say, the United States does not persecute the church. It even defends freedom of worship at home and promotes it abroad. That is true. But there are other ways in which Christians may be cowed into worshipping the state.

What would you do if you mother – or husband or wife or child – developed cancer and needed surgery followed by chemotherapy. These are expensive treatments. What would you do if you could not pay for it? What will you do if twenty years from now Social Security goes broke and payments to retirees are stopped. Will you expect your parents to live in poverty? Or will you bring your parents into your house, and you women – will you quit your jobs to care for them? What would you do if someday the only way to get a good job is to sign a document agreeing that all beliefs are equal and promising not to promote your beliefs anywhere? You see, you can survive without a good job. You can take a low-paying job. Although it is hard, you can have your parents live with you. People have been doing it for 6,000 years. And life will go on if your loved ones die of cancer. But you will not enter eternal life if you betray Jesus.

Science, technology, and the modern welfare state are the forces which squeeze Christians today. The foremost issues are health and retirement. I fear that many Christians – perhaps millions – would betray Jesus for health and prosperity. They are willing to serve Jesus as long as they can get good health care and live comfortably. But take these away, and you may see massive defections. Science and the prosperity it enables are good things – *very* good things. Peace and prosperity are very good things. A government powerful enough to protect its people is a good thing. But in the hands of sinful people, these good things can be used to corrupt the church. Where do you stand? Are you prepared to conquer? Or will you be intimidated by a powerful state?

The Beast from the Land

Satan's second attack on the church required another beast. This was a beast from the land. It performed miracles, it made an image of the first beast, and it made everyone worship the image of the beast. This beast looked like a lamb, but it had the number of a man. Have you guessed the identity of the beast? The land is John's symbol for the Jews, and all the characteristics of this beast are related to worship in some way. This beast is the Jewish religious establishment.

It can be hard to adjust to seeing the Jews as partners with the Romans, since there was such hatred between them. Palestine was a continual problem for the Romans, which is why they eventually sent a governor directly from Rome to rule Judea. Rome was tolerant by ancient standards. The Jews were allowed to practice their religion pretty much as they wished. All Rome required was order. The Jews were not so easy to control, however. They hated the Romans with a passion and periodically fomented rebellions. From our perspective in our front-row seats, Rome and the Jews appear to be implacable enemies.

But from heaven we see that they are in fact allied against God. Herod the Great was a vassal of Rome when he attempted to kill baby Jesus. Thirty-three years later Pilate agreed to the demand of the Jewish leaders to put Jesus to death. At the pivotal moment when Pilate said to the Jews, “‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’” (John 19:15) From then on the Jewish hatred of Rome increased, but they were willing to serve Rome if she would kill Jesus and persecute Christians. The Jews were delighted when Herod Agrippa killed James and imprisoned Peter.

Early in the first century Herod the Great began a massive project to improve the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews hated Herod because he was a half-breed, but they were very proud of their temple. For decades the work went on. Ancient authors describe the temple as an architectural masterpiece – a building of glorious splendor. Rome supported this project to pacify the Jews, and because prayers were offered for the emperor there every day. The Jews controlled access to God because they controlled the temple. If you wished to approach God, you would go to Jerusalem, buy the sacrifice you needed from the Jews, and offer it according to their instructions. In the temple no one could buy or sell without their approval.

This temple was the culmination of a process begun a thousand years earlier. Solomon built the first temple. He came to the throne of Israel after his father David, and sought to serve God. He was a better administrator than his father, and the nation grew immensely wealthy under his rule. The temple he built was stunningly beautiful. When he dedicated it, the fiery glory cloud of God's presence filled the holy of holies. God rested there in the temple above the cherubim. But Solomon's love grew cold. Wealth poured in, and with it came apathy toward God. He made alliances with foreign powers. He married foreign wives. He instituted a massive military build-up. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 contains the laws specifically for kings. There were three commands. First, he must not acquire many horses. Second, he must not acquire many wives. And third, he must not acquire a lot of gold. 1 Kings 10:14-11:8 tells the sad tale of Solomon's fall. Solomon broke every one of the commands to the king. Solomon is the man who built the temple of God, but lost his love for God. And in all the Bible, the only other place where you can find the number 666 is where Solomon's annual gold income was reported (1 Kings 10:14). 666 is the number of Solomon, the man who turned from God.

The land beast is the Jews. In years past they, like Solomon, had loved God. But no more. Now they have joined forces with the sea beast and are at war with God. They killed God's Son and are attempting to exterminate His followers. Judea looks like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. The land has swallowed the river that came from the mouth of the dragon. The Jews are completely committed to the false gospel of salvation by the law. Now that they have absorbed this false gospel, they are preaching it. The land beast sounds like the dragon. The image of the beast is not a sculpture of an animal. It is the physical manifestation of dragon worship. That is the temple. The temple, which like Solomon and Israel was once dedicated to God, is now devoted to the worship of Satan and the service of Rome. Jew and gentile are united to destroy the children of Jesus.

Satan the Counterfeiter

One of the main themes of Revelation is counterfeiting. I was alerted to this by Dr. Vern Poythress in his book *The Returning King*¹. All through Revelation Satan is revealed as the great counterfeiter. Satan is very intelligent and very powerful, but he is merely a creature. God alone creates *ex nihilo* – from nothing. Creatures can do no more than imitate God. The best and most creative creatures are very good imitators. All virtue springs from God, and great artists are great because they imitate God better than the rest of us. (Part of the genius of great artists is imitating God's ability to see things in many new ways. Imitating God is not just snapshot photography.) The reason Satan is such a dangerous foe is that he imitates God so well.

This chapter contains some of the most concentrated examples of Satan's counterfeits. First, did you notice that Satan imitates God by bringing beast from the sea? God did this long ago when he raised up gentile Babylon to conquer Israel. It is all recorded in the book of Daniel (see chapter 7). Second, Satan brings forth a creature from the earth – just as God did in creating man. When God created man, He made him in his own image. Likewise Satan creates beasts in his own image. They look, act, and speak like him. Taking all these together we have a whole trinity. Satan produces a son who rules, and he produces a false

¹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000) pp. 16-22.

prophet – the land beast – whose work is parallel to the Holy Spirit. You can see this clearly in chapter 16:13. This chapter shows people worshiping all three – dragon, sea beast, and land beast – because they are a false trinity. Fourth, Satan stages a counterfeit resurrection. That is the significance of 13:3. Notice that just as the resurrection of Jesus is the compelling evidence that He is the Son of God who saves, so the false resurrection of the sea beast convinces people to worship and follow it. Fifth, the land beast looks like a lamb. It pretends to be in the image of Jesus and performs great signs. By these signs it deceives the Jewish people to worship the sea beast.

It is because of this complex counterfeit of God and His work that Satan is able to implement the second part of his strategy to destroy the church – confusion. Remember that this chapter is not about Satan’s work of deceiving, enslaving, and tormenting the world. This chapter is about Satan’s attack on the children of the glorious woman – the church. Satan will succeed in intimidating some of the church to defect. They will fear the terrible power of the state and cave in to its demands. But what about the rest of the church? If Satan simply came and said, “Hey, I’m over here. I deserve equal time. Why not worship me, too?” Christians would recognize him and refuse his offer. Instead Satan seeks to lure Christians away from Christ by confusing them. Satan offers a religion which looks very much like Christianity, but at its core is Satan worship. We saw last week that one of his tactics is to add law to the gospel. The apostles fought this tooth and nail because they knew that Jesus plus anything will not save anyone. At first it seems right that in addition to believing in Jesus you must also live a good moral life. But this is a distortion. Only Jesus, and Jesus alone can save you. Of course godly behavior flows from true belief in Jesus – but you cannot add a set of ethics to the gospel as a condition of salvation. This was the first and most insidious method of confusing the church.

Now Satan has gone further and embodied this false gospel in a false religion. The Jewish leadership claimed authority. But they had compromised such a claim by rejecting Jesus, their true King. Since they switched allegiance to Caesar they can no longer legitimately claim to lead God’s people. The temple claimed to be the house of God, but it had ceased to be God’s house. It was built and maintained by Caesar and the false leaders. At Pentecost God moved into His new house, the church. The wind and fire of Pentecost were the sign that God now lived in the church – just as the cloud and fire had been the sign that God had moved into Solomon’s temple. The Jewish leaders and the temple worship look like they constitute biblical religion, but it is a mirage. Underneath it is demon worship inspired by Satan. But on the surface it looks real – and this is its deadly potential. By looking so real, it can confuse people and lead them away from Jesus.

Satan seeks to lead people away from Jesus by confusing them. He offers a false gospel, a false God, a false savior, a false Spirit, and a false worship. But it is such a good counterfeit that he succeeds in luring people away.

Satan was so successful in confusing the Jewish people, he has been doing it ever since. For 2,000 years false gospels and false religions have sprung up in the church and led people away from Jesus. In the second and third centuries Satan used Gnosticism to attack the church – and he almost succeeded. This intoxicating mixture of gospel with Greek philosophy was irresistible to thousands of Christians, and they abandoned the faith in seeking a higher spirituality. The third and fourth centuries saw attacks on the nature of Jesus. Some taught that He was a man who was made God, and others taught that He was God who only appeared to be a man. The council of Chalcedon finally put this argument to rest. The seventh century brought the false gospel of the Koran and its companion religion Islam. These grew out of a corrupted form of Christianity in the Arabian peninsula. Islam is so appealing and so compelling because it is so close to the truth. Over the Medieval period the view gradually developed within much of the church that the sacraments of the church save us. The Reformation reminded us that only Jesus, and He alone saves us.

The nineteenth century saw the rise of two vicious counterfeits – Mormonism and liberalism. Although Mormon belief deviates wildly from the Bible, they claim to be Christians, and call themselves a church. Liberalism was an attempt to accommodate Christianity to science so that religion would be more appealing to modern people. Their primary means of doing this was to remove the supernatural from Christianity. This false religion is still prevalent in some of our major denominations, and is currently causing a brutal and public battle in the Anglican Church. The Jehovah's Witnesses arose in the twentieth century. They deny the deity of Christ and demand strict adherence to their laws, yet still claim to be true to the Bible. All these heretical movements have seen some measure of success because they mix truth and error, and in the process they confuse people.

Satan is still confusing people, and you are not immune to his temptations. The root of all Satan's confusions is to replace the real gospel with a false gospel. The greatest danger for most of us is not an outright rejection of Jesus, but adding something else to Him. In the eastern church this most often takes the form of tradition. Orthodox Christianity rightly respects the rich tradition of our faith, but often goes beyond respect to putting tradition on the same level as Jesus. But only Jesus, and He alone saves. Roman Christianity tends to teach salvation by Jesus plus the sacraments. They rightly recognize the huge value of the sacraments, but the sacraments do not save. Only Jesus, and He alone saves. The Protestant temptation is closest to the first century situation. We tend to teach salvation by Jesus plus law. We emphatically deny this, but what ultimately convinces us someone is saved is when his life conforms to our personal moral standards, or when he has performed the work of saying the sinner's prayer. If you tell some Protestants that you believe in Jesus, but you cannot name when you prayed to receive Him into your heart, they will not think you are a Christian. For others, you must fall in line with their own particular moral standard – either liberal or conservative – to be accepted as a true Christian. But only Jesus, and He alone saves.

Avoiding the Counterfeits

Do you know how to spot a counterfeit? The surest way to be able to identify counterfeits – whether they be money, or art, or religion – is to be thoroughly familiar with the real thing. You cannot examine all the possible ways people may concoct to make fake money, art, or Christianity. But you can thoroughly know the real thing. Then when you see the counterfeit, you will spot it immediately. Tonight's lesson is simple, but vital. Learn about Jesus. Do not be satisfied with a passing acquaintance. That may be enough to lead you to happily hell. Apply yourself to a lifelong study of the scripture. Read the Christian tradition. Use the sacraments. Listen to sound teaching. Do what Jesus says. But always beware of adding anything to Jesus. Only Jesus, and He alone saves.

C. David Green
Lehigh University
March 27, 2007