

The Devil of the Bible

WEEKLY READINGS:

Exodus, chapters 21-26

Proverbs, chapter 3.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Hebrews, chapter 2.



I didn't do it!

A child had been playing, and had left a lot of torn paper lying untidily on the floor. His mother looked rather cross when she saw it. "Who did that?" she asked. The little boy answered promptly, "Daddy!"

We're all a bit like that little boy. We just don't like to admit when we've done something wrong. We like to blame someone else. But the apostle James tells us, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." (James, chapter 1, verse 14).

And we have to admit, if we are honest, that it is the evil thoughts in our own mind that make us do and say evil things. We cannot lay the blame for our sins on anyone else.

Who, then, is the Devil?

The Bible certainly speaks of a devil. If he is not a supernatural being, tempting men to do evil, we must ask the question, "Who is he?"

Let us see if we can find out from the Bible. First, look at I John, chapter 3, verse 8. This verse tells us why Jesus was sent.

"For THIS PURPOSE the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

We have the same idea taken a little further in Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 14, where we read,

“Forsamuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

This second passage tells us that Jesus came to destroy the devil, and it explains how He did it. He came as a frail human being, and died in order to destroy the devil.

How strange! If the devil was a very powerful and deceitful monster, that would have been impossible. No - the devil of the Bible - the devil that Jesus destroyed by dying on a cross, was sin. We read in Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 26,
“Now...hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

We have emphasised in an earlier lesson (“The Cross”) that Jesus inherited a nature like ours. It was a nature that could be tempted by sin. Jesus fought against sin all His life; and finally destroyed sin completely by destroying the very nature that could be tempted. It was because of this that God raised Him from the dead and gave Him a “glorious body”, free from all sin, and immortal.

The Devil and sin

There is one simple way of showing that sin and the devil are the same thing. All that the Bible says about the devil , it say about sin.

The devil is the enemy of God - so is sin.
The devil is the tempter of man - so is sin. The devil is deceitful - so is sin.
The devil causes death (Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 14) - so does sin. The devil was destroyed by the death of Christ - so was sin.

From these comparisons we can see that the devil and sin must be the same thing.

What does the word “Devil” really mean?

The word “devil” really means “slanderer”, or “false accuser”. In I Timothy, chapter 3, verse 11, we read,
“Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers.”

The word translated “slanderer” here is the same word that is translated “devil” in other places.

The word “satan” is also used - usually in the New testament. A “satan” is an adversary - one who opposes. So when Peter tries to persuade Jesus to turn aside from the way in which God has said He must go - the way of the cross - Peter becomes an adversary, and Jesus says to him, “Get thee behind Me, satan” (Matthew, chapter 16, verse 23).

Anything which works against God may be called “satan”, so when Paul was prevented from going to see the Thessalonians, he wrote to them, “Satan hindered us” (I Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 18).

There is one more passage - this time from the Old Testament - which we must look at, now, because some people think it teaches us that Satan is a fallen angel. It is in Isaiah, chapter 14, verse 12, and it reads, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!”

But if we read the whole chapter, we find that this “Lucifer” is the King of Babylon, and the prophet is foretelling his downfall. In verse 15, Isaiah speaks of this king’s death, and goes on to say, in verse 16, “Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?”

Casting out devils

The writers of the New Testament, when telling us of the miracles of healing that Jesus performed, often use the expression, “He cast out devils”. How are we to understand this?

In the days of Jesus, it is commonly thought that certain illnesses, and also afflictions, such as deafness and blindness, were caused by evil spirits which took possession of a man. It was natural, when the man was healed, to say that the “devil was gone out of him”, and, in using this expression, the gospel writers were simply using a phrase which was common in those days. We do not imagine that, because they wrote in this way, they really believed that evil spirits dwelt in men.

The one great Creator

Belief in an evil being, who is God’s great rival, is not new. In the days of Isaiah the prophet, the Persians believed in two great powers, corresponding to God and the devil. The first was supposed to be the creator of light and goodness, and the second of darkness, and all that is evil.

In answer to this wrong belief, God sent a message through the prophet Isaiah. We can read it for ourselves, in Isaiah, chapter 45, verses 5-7, "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though hast not known Me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things".

(The word "evil" here must not be confused with sin. It means "trouble" - that God brings upon sinners).

This passage proves to us finally that there is one great power in the universe, ordering all things - one great Creator, the Lord God Almighty. There is no creature that can challenge His power, and there is no powerful and deceitful monster, called the devil, who can dare to oppose Him.

One final word: You may want to ask why the Bible so often uses the word "devil" instead of just saying "sin"; and why it speaks of this devil as if it were describing a powerful and deceitful person. It is surely so that we can understand how powerful and how deceitful sin is. We must learn this lesson before we can appreciate fully how much we need to be saved from sin.

What we have learnt

1. The devil is not a great evil spirit.
2. The devil, or Satan, are just Bible names for what we now call "human nature".
3. That is where temptation comes from - from within our own sinful, human nature.
4. Men who give in to temptation, and behave wickedly, are sometimes called "Satan", too.

A new start

WEEKLY READINGS:

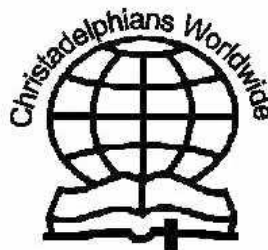
Exodus, chapters 27-32

Matthew, chapters 5-7.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Acts, chapter 8,

Romans, chapter 6.



Baptism

Have you ever watched a small child, when he turns over to a new page of his writing book? The new page looks so clean and unspoiled, that he takes extra care, as he begins to write, that he doesn't spoil it. He makes a fresh start.

When we begin to understand how much Jesus has done for us, we shall want to "turn over a new leaf" and make a fresh start, too. We shall want to follow Him.

God's way

In Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, we read that Jesus said to His disciples, before He went into heaven,

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, (or, make disciples of all nations) baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Read these verses carefully. You will notice that when they made disciples, they were to baptise them. Baptism is the way God has chosen for us to make a new start.

When we obey this commandment, God forgives us our past sins. Jesus Himself, although He had done no sin, set us an example by being baptised. Read in Matthew, chapter 3, verses 13-17, how Jesus came to the River Jordan, and how His cousin John baptised Him there.

Have you noticed that, when John said that he was unworthy to baptise Jesus, he was told:

“Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew, chapter 3, verse 15).

He did not say “me”, he said “us”, showing that we too must be baptised. It is essential for salvation.

Burial in water

Baptism means a complete burial under water. It is as though, when we go under the water, we die, and when we come out of the water again, we are ready to begin a new life. In a way, we die with Christ, and then we rise with Him. Paul tells us this in the chapter you have read in Romans. Read again verses 3-4,

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death?”

“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Christening and Baptism

Perhaps you have heard of babies being “baptised” or christened, when they are sprinkled with water on the forehead.

But this is not really baptism. You remember Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved” (Mark, chapter 16, verse 16). We must understand and believe first, and a baby cannot do this.

And, of course, being sprinkled with water is not the same as being buried in it and coming up again out of the water. It cannot remind us in the same way of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

A man who believed and was baptised

You will notice in the reading in Acts, chapter 8, that the eunuch, a servant of the Queen of Ethiopia, said,

“Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?” (verse 36).

There was one condition. Philip said to him,
“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (verse 37).

You will notice, too, that “they went down both into the water” (verse 38). That was necessary because Philip was going to baptise the eunuch by burying him completely under the water.

A big decision

Here is another very important passage about baptism:

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women” (Acts, chapter 8, verse 12).

We learn from this quotation that people should not rush into baptism before they are ready. The men and women of Samaria were not baptised until “they believed...the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”

Deciding to be baptised is the most important decision of a lifetime. It is not a decision to make lightly. Before baptism, it is necessary to understand, and believe, the true teaching of the Bible. After baptism, it is necessary to fight against temptation and try to obey God’s commandments always.

Without these things - belief of true Bible teaching first, and obedience to God afterwards - baptism is worthless.

Children of God

We are born the children of Adam. But when we are baptised we are taken into the family of God, and we become the children of God. Every man and woman is a child of Adam, and the Bible speaks of them as being “in Adam”.

When we are baptised, we “put on Christ”, and are spoken of as being “in Christ”. Paul tells us in Galatians, chapter 3, verses 26-27, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

“For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.”

We have new hope of life, for we read in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 22, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Christ our Mediator

We make a fresh start at our baptism. But we cannot live without sinning. What happens if we sin, after we are baptised?

Because we are “in Christ”, we have Jesus Christ to be our mediator, and to pray to God for us - and, if we are really sorry we have sinned, we may be sure that God will hear Him, and forgive us our sins for His sake. The apostle John writes,

“If any man sin, we have an advocate (or, a mediator) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John, chapter 2, verse 1).

Summary

1. God has commanded us to be baptised.
2. Baptism is a complete burial in water.
3. Because baptism must follow belief, it is for adults, not babies.
4. In a figure, we die with Christ, and rise out of the water to a new life.
5. When we are baptised, we become the children of God, and the Bible speaks of us as being “in Christ”.

Some Practical Problems



WEEKLY READINGS:

Exodus, chapters 37-40
Revelation, chapter 20.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Romans, chapters 12 and 13.

Jesus said to His followers, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments (John, chapter 14, verse 15). You will remember how God, through Moses, gave the Jews a law which we call the "Law of Moses".

In the Law of Moses there were rules to tell the people what they must do, and what they must not do; and these laws were to guide them in every way in their daily life.

This law could not bring life to the people because, as you will remember, they were unable to keep it. So God gave them a "better way". He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us how to live.

Jesus did not give His followers a complete list of rules, to tell them what they must do in every circumstances of life.

He told them the most important thing which was to love God, and to show love to each other.

But both Jesus and the apostles gave some definite "do's" and "don'ts", which we must understand and obey.

We must obey our rulers

In Romans, chapter 13, we read, in verse 1,

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers."

Whoever our ruler may be, he holds that position because God allows him to do so. (1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 13-15). This is true, too, of the people who are over us at work.

So we must obey those who have authority over us, even when they are unkind and unreasonable. So Peter tells us,

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." (1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 18).

The only time this does not apply is when a ruler tells us to disobey God. Once, when the Jews forbade Peter and John to teach about Jesus and His resurrection, they answered:

“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts, chapter 4, verses 19-20).

Jesus Himself prayed for those who put Him to death. If we remember His example, we shall find it easier to return good for evil. We must leave to God the task of punishing the wicked. So the apostle Paul says,

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay’, saith the Lord” (Romans, chapter 12, verse 19).

The disciple does not fight

We must obey our rulers in all things - except when their rules conflict with the law of God.

For example, in most countries in these days there are laws commanding all young men to serve for a period in the Army, Navy, or Air Force. But God has said that His children must not fight. Jesus said, “...all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” (Matthew, chapter 26, verse 52).

He taught His followers to pray for their enemies, and so show them love, no matter what the provocation:

“But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew, chapter 5, verse 39).

So, although it may mean trouble, and even imprisonment, the Christian must always refuse to fight or to join the armed forces.

This is not because wars are always wrong; when God orders men to fight, then it is right to do so. But His commandment for us in this age is, that we “resist not evil”; knowing that the day will come, when God Himself will execute judgment on the wicked.

Voting

Like the children of God in all ages, the Christians of these days are, “...strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 13). They are waiting for God’s Kingdom to come; praying that they may have a place in that Kingdom.

They know that present-day governments will all pass away when that Kingdom comes. They take no part in the politics of this world. They do not vote, because their views of life are such that no politician could act as their “representative”.

“For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20).

Marriage - a partnership in Christ

There are two classes of people in the world - those “in Adam”, and those “in Christ”. The difference between these two classes is immense. Those in Adam are selfish and worldly; those in Christ are the servants of God.

Naturally, those in Christ will feel a great sense of unity, and will help each other to serve God faithfully. They will not mix with the people of the world, because their interests are so different.

Above all, they will show their separation from the world in their attitude to marriage. They will choose their marriage partners from the family of God, and not from the world. The apostle Paul emphasises the importance of this separation in I Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 14-16,

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God; as God hath said, I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

We can never be truly happy if we break God’s laws; and experience has shown that it is a tragic mistake to marry an unbeliever.

God hates “putting away”

Marriage is a union for life. When God created Eve as a “help” for Adam, the principle was laid down:

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24).

The Lord Jesus confirmed that marriage is for a lifetime by saying:

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew, chapter 19, verse 6).

So the Lord Jesus forbids divorce. Even if a marriage is not going smoothly for the moment, a Christian must show patience and love. In Malachi, chapter 16, we read that:

“...the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away.”

Remember, we can never be truly happy if we break God’s laws.

But

We have talked about the importance of marrying only a believer. But it sometimes happens that a man or woman who becomes a disciple is already married. In this case, the believing partner is not called upon to leave the other. Of course, if would be difficult to stop the unbeliever from leaving, if he or she were intent on doing so.

But the believer is expected to fulfil his or her part faithfully in trying to “make the marriage a success”.

Many people have been won to Christ by the faithful example of their believing partners - just as Paul suggested they might be in I Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 16:

“For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”

A word about polygamy

In some countries a man is permitted to have two (or more) wives at the same time. Like marriage to an unbeliever, and like divorce, this is a great mistake. It creates unhappiness, and tends to encourage unfaithfulness; and it sets aside the great Christian ideal on one husband and one wife, united in love:

“Therefore shall a man...cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”
(Genesis, chapter 2, verse 24).

All one in Christ

The believers are all joined together as one body, with Christ as their Head. It is their duty to see that the truth revealed in the Bible is kept pure; and that none adds to it, or takes from it. It is their duty, too, to strive to keep the commandments of Christ.

If one of the members deliberately breaks these commandments, then the others must do all they can to help him to see his mistake, and return to the right way. If he still persists in acting wrongly, then his fellow-disciples have no choice but to separate themselves from him.

Fellowship in Christ

The disciples of Christ are scattered all over the world, but they serve the same Master, and share the same hope.

They are joined together in the bonds of love and fellowship - joined together in the work of preaching the gospel.

So Paul commands us,

“Do all thing without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” (Philippians, chapter 2, verses 14-16).

Summary

1. We must obey our rulers, except when they tell us to disobey God.
2. We must not take an active part in politics or (worse still) in war.
3. A man must have only one wife, and stay with her for life.
4. It is a tragic mistake to marry an unbeliever.

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Walking in Newness of Life

WEEKLY READINGS:

Psalm 119

Philemon.

READING FOR STUDY PAPER:

Hebrews, chapter 12.



When we are baptised, we are born again. To Nicodemus, who came to Him by night, Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John, chapter 3, verse 3).

Jesus goes on to explain that He is thinking, not of a natural birth, but a birth of the Spirit. He says in John, chapter 3, verse 6, "That which is born of the flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

When a baby is born, a new life begins. And so, when we are baptised, we begin a new life - a life "in Christ".

The apostle Paul tells us in II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17, "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

If we are to grow up in Christ Jesus, we have to do our part, striving continually. If we don't strive, that "old man" which we renounced when we were baptised will get the better of us.

Help in the way

If we had to struggle alone, we could never "grow up" in Christ. But God has given us all we need for our spiritual growth.

He has given us the great privilege of coming to Him in prayer, through the Lord Jesus. All our difficulties, our joys and our sorrows, we may confide in

Him, coming to Him reverently, and asking Him to help us and hear us for Jesus' sake.

He has given us His Word, the Bible. We could have no better guide; it will teach us more about God's ways; it will help us to act as He would have us do, and to grow up into that "new man" in Christ. We read in II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16-17 that, "All scripture...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

He has given us the ability to think about His Word and His ways. It is written in the book of Proverbs, chapter 23, verse 7, "...as he (him that hath an evil eye - verse 6) thinketh in his heart, so is he."

If we let our minds dwell more and more on the things of God, we shall gradually become better men and women.

Believing and doing

Reading and praying and meditating will help us to do the right things. Someone once asked Jesus, "...Which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew, chapter 22, verse 36).

We read the reply of Jesus in verses 37-39, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

These commandments are not easy to keep. We shall only be able to love God with all our heart and soul and mind if we keep reminding ourselves how much God has loved us, and how much He has done for us.

He has done great things for us. How can we pay the great debt we owe Him? We can do nothing for Him.

But what does Jesus give us as the second commandment? "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Here is something we can do. We can help other people, and show them thoughtfulness and love, as God has shown love to us.

The greatest thing we can do for others is to pass on to them the good news of the Kingdom of God, which we ourselves have come to believe.

As God has invited us to keep His ways, and to share in the joys of His Kingdom, so we must invite others to share the joy we have found.

Jesus once said,
“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew, chapter 7, verse 12).

God will accept the acts of love which we show our fellow men as if they were done to Him. So there is something we can do to show our appreciation of His love to us.

The disciple and the world

There are many things in the world today which are ungodly. There are, for instance, many books, papers, pictures, which quickly turn our minds to things that are evil and impure; and sometimes these things appeal to us very much. But - however much they appeal to us - we just have to turn away from them; if we don't, they will turn us away from God.

Taking no part in the ungodly pleasures of the world will mean losing some of our friends - for they won't understand why we now refuse to do things which we once enjoyed.

But we shall find many new friends; for all who - like us - have separated themselves from the world, will be united together. They will be children of God, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Remembering Jesus

Baptism gives us a fresh start. We set out, when we are baptised, on the strait and narrow way that leads to God's Kingdom. But we are still very human, and we soon forget how much Jesus did for us when He died on the cross.

Jesus knew how easily His disciples would forget: so He told them to do something to remind them. Turn to the gospel of Luke, chapter 22, and read verses 14-20. This is the story of what is usually called the “Last Supper”, because it is the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples before His death.

See how the bread and the wine were to remind His disciples how Jesus gave His life for them. He said to them, “...this do in remembrance of Me”.

Now read I Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 23-28. The early Christians met on the first day of each week to remember Jesus in the way in which He had commanded them.

True disciples of the Lord Jesus will meet together, as the first disciples did (and usually Sunday is the most convenient day for such meetings), to break bread and to drink wine, remembering how Jesus' body was broken and His blood was shed for them.

As we grow up in Christ, remembering Jesus in this way will become more and more important to us, helping us to realise that He is with us all the time.

You must decide

And so, as you finish reading these papers, you will be like one who stands at the foot of a signpost. One way, you know, leads to death. The other is the way of life. Along the way of life travel those who have believed the Word of God, and been baptised into Christ. Jesus Himself is with them as they travel. Will you join them, too? Will you believe the glorious message of the Word of God? Will you be baptised into Christ? Remember that Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mark, chapter 16, verse 16).

Summary

1. Every day we must try to read something from the Bible, and say our prayer.
2. After we have been baptised, we must try to meet with our fellow believers every week, to break and drink wine in memory of Jesus. (Of course, this may not always be possible, because there may not be people with the same beliefs in our part of the world).
3. We must try to give up all things likely to make us sin.
4. We must try continually to do good to other people.