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SMALL GROUPS

THE DARK SIDE

CONFRONTING EVIL



JEREMIAH JOHNSTON

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The Dark Side: Confronting Evil
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The battle is on. Join the fight!

Few people want to be in a battle. As followers of Christ, however, we're in the middle of a conflict that has been raging for thousands of years—whether we know it or not. Ours is a spiritual battle, and it's critical for us to know the stakes.

Anyone with military experience will tell you the value of knowing your enemy and determining what you're up against. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis identified two wrong attitudes people often hold about evil: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."¹

In this study, *The Dark Side*, we'll take a deeper look at the truth about Satan, demons, and the pervasive evil in the paranormal world. Yes, those are dark subjects, but they're also critical for those of us who need to know what we're up against.

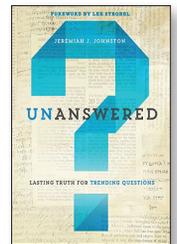
Thankfully, this study will also examine everything we've been given in Christ to stand against the forces of evil. We don't need to be afraid! In fact, through the truth of who we are in Christ and the armor He has made available to us, we can stand confidently against the devil's schemes.

Yes, Satan is mighty, but our God is Almighty!



Jeremiah J. Johnston

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1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) IX.

1

SATAN



What monster or fictional villain best represents evil to you?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

*Satan fights against us,
but we can stand in Christ.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We can't deny evil exists. It's all around us.

That reality struck home when I saw the shoes—piles of children's shoes. I was visiting the infamous Nazi concentration camp known as Buchenwald. Over 250,000 people were cruelly imprisoned there, and conservative estimates put the death toll between 40 and 50 thousand innocents. Seeing the ovens left little to the imagination, but it was the shoes of the countless children who died that hit me with the harsh reality of evil.

Unfortunately, evil isn't something we just see in fiction. Evil is no illusion, and while it can certainly reside in the hearts of people, such evil is most clearly seen in the one who seeks to inspire it: Satan. The Book of Revelation shows us exactly who this Satan is, the one who seeks to harm us.

Thankfully, the Book of Revelation also tells us of Satan's defeat. In this study, we'll see what Christ has done for us and how we can stand against Satan's schemes.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Revelation 12:7-9

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out — the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation is a prophetic book full of visions and symbolism, which has given rise to a few disagreements in interpretation. Thankfully, John's apocalyptic vision is crystal clear about several key truths: God remains sovereign, He brings redemption to its complete fulfillment, and His eternal kingdom is firmly established. Revelation also reveals Christ as our victorious King.

Another truth that becomes clear in John's vision is Satan's defeat. Revelation 12 describes a war in which Satan, pictured as a great dragon, is defeated by God's angelic forces. When does this war take place? Some scholars believe the battle occurred at the time of Jesus' ascension, when the Son "was caught up to God and to his throne" (Rev. 12:5). Other scholars are convinced the battle will take place in the future—specifically, during the latter days of the tribulation.

We might differ on the timing of this war, but we can be clear on one thing: at its conclusion, Satan is defeated. Satan no longer has any right to be in heaven, the place where Jesus "has been exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33). But the devil doesn't go down without a fight. He still wants to destroy us.

Satan has been working to deceive God's people since the beginning. According to Jesus: "He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

What have you been taught about the devil?

QUESTION #2

Make no mistake: Satan works to confuse us, lie to us, deceive us, and ruin our lives and spiritual vitality. He tries to get us to see things from our distorted human perspective rather than with our hearts devoted to the honor and glory of our Creator.

The unfortunate truth is that we believe the enemy's lies on a regular basis. He is crafty, and we are easy targets when we're unprepared. Therefore, followers of Christ must be ever vigilant. We must keep our focus on God and God's will rather than our own desires.

Where do you see evidence of Satan's deceptive work in the world today?

QUESTION #3

Revelation 12:10

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, "The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have now come, because the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been thrown down."

Did you know that "Devil" is not a personal name? Neither is "Satan." These are titles that describe our enemy's evil body of work. In the Greek language, the word *diabolos* refers to someone who slanders and accuses. The devil is continually speaking against us.

Indeed, we see in Revelation 12 that Satan not only seeks to deceive us, he also seeks to accuse us—just as he accused others throughout God's Word:

- ▶ **The devil accused Job.** Satan stood before God and accused the righteous Job of not having a deep commitment to God. He even accused God of protecting Job from harm so that the man would not reveal his true nature. (See Job 1:9-11.)
- ▶ **The devil accused Joshua.** Zechariah saw a vision in which Satan stood at the right side of the high priest, Joshua, to accuse him. (See Zech. 3:1.)

NOT EVEN CLOSE

People often view God and Satan as opposing forces of equal strength—good and evil locked in an eternal struggle. In reality, God is superior to Satan in every way. It's not even close. Use the chart below to list some of God's attributes, along with how Satan compares. (An example is provided.)

God

Omnipresent (He exists everywhere)

Satan

Exists only in one place at a time

How can the church better communicate the reality of God's superiority over Satan?

- ▶ **The devil accuses us.** You surely have felt his accusations. *“You’ve sinned too much.” “You’re not good enough.” “If you really loved Jesus, you wouldn’t think that way.” “You’ve failed.”*

Satan is relentless; he desires to accuse us “before our God day and night.” His accusations can sting, but let’s not lose sight of a greater truth: this lying accuser has been thrown down.

Because of Christ, we have an Advocate—someone who stands with us against Satan’s accusations.

- ▶ **The Lord stood with Joshua.** In Zechariah’s vision, the Lord answered Satan’s accusations by saying: “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! May the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!” (Zech. 3:2).
- ▶ **The Lord stood with Peter.** Hours before His arrest and trial, Jesus said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31-32).
- ▶ **The Lord stands with us.** Satan was defeated through the work of Christ, and Christ now stands for us. He is our Advocate: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one” (1 John 2:1).

Believing Satan’s lies can destroy our spiritual vitality. We must know our enemy’s tactics, and we must always return to the reality of our faith and the forgiveness we’ve received through Jesus Christ.

How should we understand Satan’s role as our “accuser”?

QUESTION #4



Revelation 12:11-12

¹¹ They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; for they did not love their lives to the point of death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you with great fury, because he knows his time is short."

So far we've seen that Satan is relentless in his deceit and accusations. That can feel overwhelming when we remember how powerful he is. But don't lose heart! Satan may be powerful, but God is all-powerful. Satan is a created being with limitations. He is certainly no equal with God.

Best of all: *he is already defeated!*

One of the blessings of the gospel is that we don't have to bring about Satan's defeat; we only have to stand in the victory we receive through Jesus. Looking ahead to the cross, Jesus said: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32). Our victory is assured because, after He died, Jesus walked out of a borrowed tomb. Our redemption and our relationship with the Victor is eternally secure.

"Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:33-34).

According to Revelation 12:12, Satan "knows his time is short." That's why he stays after us—and that's why we need to stay vigilant. Satan will attack, but we can resist him by daily lifting up Jesus in our lives and dying to our "old" selves. No more darkness; no more bondage. Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

We can stand against Satan because we can stand in Christ.

What are some ways we can defend against Satan's accusations?

QUESTION #5

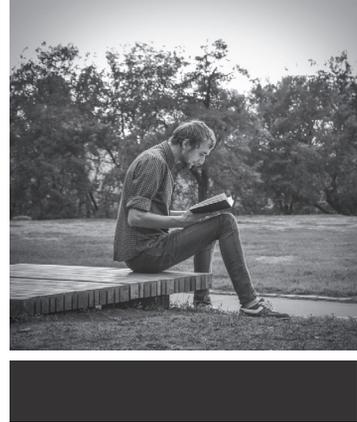
LIVE IT OUT

We can overcome Satan through Jesus. What will you do this week to walk in that victory?

- ▶ **Confess.** Turn from sin and give Satan no grounds for accusations in your life. Place your trust in Christ for forgiveness and freedom.
- ▶ **Read.** Make Scripture reading a daily habit. Let the truth of Scripture fill your mind rather than the deceit and lies of Satan. Test every thought to see how it stands against the truth of Christ in His Word.
- ▶ **Speak.** When you see others living in false guilt because of Satan's lies, point to the victory they can have in Christ. Lead them to embrace the truth and walk in victory.

Don't fall into the trap of believing evil doesn't exist—or believing that evil only impacts the world in faraway places. Satan is a clear and present danger to God's people. Thankfully, our status as God's people means we can claim the victory He has already won.

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLdarkside**