

The Diabolos

"In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing ... When I would do good, evil is present with me ... The law of sin which is in my members"—Romans 7:18-23

WE BELIEVE that the Bible, which we regard as wholly and infallibly inspired by God, does not teach the existence of a personal, supernatural monster known as the Devil, and further, that the teachings of Scripture on this and related subjects entirely rule out the possibility of such a being.

We believe that the true picture of sin and temptation and all their attendant evils is entirely and wholesomely different from the one presented by orthodox Christendom which is all centered around a mythical hoofed and horned monster who has vast and universal power, who dominates by far the greatest part of all human activities, and who plies his evil craft freely throughout all God's wide dominions.

This doctrine can only flourish in the atmosphere of a limited and degraded conception of God. It further requires a degraded conception of the conditions in heaven, and a degraded conception of the divine and sinless immortal nature that is held forward as the reward of the righteous.

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IT IS undeniably true that some passages of Scripture appear to attribute personality to that which the Bible terms the diabolos, or devil. But a full view of the whole subject must guide us as to what is actual personality and what is personification.

The Scriptures personify many things—far more than we realize until we begin to watch for them. Animals, birds, fishes, mountains, the earth, cities, countries, riches, wisdom, righteousness, sin, death, the grave, love, parts of the body, blood—all are personified, sometimes very vividly and at great length.

Just as the diabolos, or mind of the flesh, is personified, so is wisdom, or the mind of the Spirit. Several chapters in Proverbs present in extended detail the activities and characteristics of a woman whose name is Wisdom.

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BUT THE scriptural devil is not just a personification but the centralization under one clear-cut term of many complex ideas, all interrelated. The use of the word "soul" in the Scriptures is a striking parallel. "Soul" means much more than just "life" or any one of the many different words used to translate it.

It means life as related to animal, breathing creatures, but it also embraces all the functions and manifestations of that life, and all living creatures themselves.

So the devil, or diabolos, is human sin and opposition to God in every manifestation and consequence—personal, political, social and religious. It includes under one brief term all that is human and fleshly, as opposed to that which is divine.

UNQUESTIONABLY THERE IS A DEVIL—it is he who tempts us—draws us away from God—causes us to sin—leads us into the way of death. The conception that this is some great supernatural monster who has the whole world in bondage to his will is utterly unreal and unscriptural—a carried-over relic of heathen superstition. As Paul says in speaking about the idols and deities of Greece, to the pagans there were many gods—

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of Whom are ALL things" (1 Cor. 8:6).

—all-powerful, all-wise, everywhere present.

A true conception of the omnipotence and unique position of God as the absolute Lord and Ruler of the universe would of itself rule out this idea of a tremendously powerful and everywhere-present enemy dominating God's dominions and frustrating His efforts for man's good—a creature so great as to be able at the same moment to influence the lives of the 300 million people on earth, besides completely controlling the destinies of countless billions more already in hell.

This belief presents us with not one supreme, unrivalled God, but two—a god of good and a god of evil, the latter far more successful in the number of followers he controls and leads away into eternal torment in hell-fire (which is a part of the orthodox devil picture).

The Scriptures present the conflict of sin as RIGHT WITHIN MAN HIMSELF—this orthodox devil belief takes it right outside of man and makes it a struggle of two great rival supernatural powers in which man is a practically helpless victim.

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The orthodox devil is a fallen angel. This is the most unscriptural and repulsive aspect of the personal devil theory.

The belief that there could possibly be war in heaven among God's holy angels, and a large number of angels be consequently cast out, is utterly degrading to a true concept of the glory of God and the eternal beauty and perfection of His appointments.

This conception destroys all the stability and value of God's plan of the ages. A poet even of the world has well perceived the implications of this belief and how it jeopardizes all assurance of salvation. The Devil is represented as uttering this exultant challenge to his followers as he fell from heaven—

Through the seams of the shaken foundations,
Smoke up in great joy,
With the smoke of your fierce exaltations
Deform and destroy;
Smoke up with your lurid revenges
And darken the face
Of the heavens, and taunt them with changes
From glory and grace.
We are falling while destiny strangles,
Pull down with us all;
Let them look to the rest of the angels—
WHO'S SAFE FROM A FALL?

The angels of God are immortal, for we are told that the redeemed shall be made like them, to die no more. An immortal rebel is an impossibility, because—

"The wages of sin is death."

Jesus said in his prayer—

"Thy will be done on earth, AS IT IS DONE IN HEAVEN."

He quotes heaven as **the ideal state of eternal good and security and harmony**. Did he overlook the ever present possibility of further rebellions there?

After all the toil and sorrow and struggle and evil of the present dispensation, is THIS the best we have to look forward to, a perpetuation—on a vastly more terrifying scale—of the old nightmare of viciousness and war?

Surely we can see how pitifully limited, human and debased this personal devil idea is, which begins with rebellion in God's holy dwelling place!

HOW LITTLE THE INVENTORS OF THIS IDEA KNEW ABOUT GOD!

It is a fantastic relic of paganism and heathen superstition. It is the old story of the gods of Greece and Rome who were always fighting with each other and with men, and tumbling down to the earth.

So with the attempts to manufacture a history of the devil from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, clearly said in the context to be judgments respectively on the kings of Babylon and Tyre.

One of the strongest arguments against the personal devil is the devoted reliance of its believers on these two chapters as proof. Nothing more clearly shows the groundlessness and purely inferential imaginativeness of the conception.

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THROUGHOUT all God's dealings with Israel the devil is strangely absent—**never a word of warning against this great arch-enemy of mankind**, the greatest and most constant danger that man faces—and yet there is plenty said about sin and evil and death.

How can this omission be explained? Simply that other and more literal language is used to express the same ideas. The word 'devil' in the singular does not occur in the Old Testament. 'Devils' occurs four times only, and is translated from words which refer to the idols of the heathen, as Deut 32:17—

"They sacrifice to devils, to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up."

In the New Testament, the word that is translated devil is "diabolos." Young's concordance gives the meaning as "accuser." It is not a proper name of any particular person, but **an ordinary Greek word of common usage and meaning**. It occurs 38 times. 35 times it is translated "devil," twice "false accuser," once "slanderer."

In the last three cases the translators were forced to use the proper English equivalents for the Greek word, for it is apparent that the context would make any suggestion of a supernatural monster look ridiculous, as 1 Tim. 3:11—

*"Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers (original: **diabolos**—devils)."*

Nine of the occurrences of diabolos are connected with the temptation of Christ. We are not told who or what the diabolos was in this case. To read this account with the orthodox devil in mind makes it inconsistent and unreal. It all appears like a meaningless stage pantomime rather than the deep and vitally serious matter of real inner temptation that it was.

Jesus was tempted, we are told, in all points **like as we are** (Heb 4:15). We must look within ourselves and our own experiences for an understanding of his temptation. James says (1:14)—

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed."

We are never approached by supernatural monsters with offers that we know to be childish frauds.

Who the individual was who presented the temptation to Christ we are not told. It is not important to the lesson. God does not just cater to our curiosity. He puts in the lessons just what we need to learn.

We must find a meaning for diabolos, and an understanding of this temptation that is in harmony with fact and Scripture. Christ's real struggle, like ours, was a conquering of his own will and subjecting it to the will of God—

"Not my will, but Thine be done."

We **must** understand what the devil is to get to the bottom of what we are fighting, and how we are to fight it.

Let us look at the passage referred to in James (1:14)—

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his OWN LUST, and enticed."

What about the "devil," the tempter? Do the Scriptures give two entirely different explanations of temptation and sin, or is it **two ways of expressing the same thing**?

Lust, says James, is the first cause—the root of sin. The Scriptures say much about lust, attributing all corruption to it:

"Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom 13:14).

"Crucify the flesh with all its lusts" (Gal 5:24).

"Abstain from fleshly lusts, that war against the soul."

The whole issue is the war between flesh and spirit—

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal 5:17).

THE FLESH IS THE GREAT ENEMY. Paul says (Gal. 5:19)—

"The works of the flesh are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, envy, murder, drunkenness."

Where is the devil? **He is there, but under a different name.** There are not two explanations of sin and evil, but one. The works of the flesh are the works of the devil that we are told Christ came in the flesh in order to destroy.

The battleground is within ourselves—between flesh and Spirit—let us never be diverted from that. The wiles of the devil within us consist in shifting the blame and attention to some imaginary monster—

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

Jesus said (Matt: 15:19)—

"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

This is the Scriptural devil—the natural, ordinary thinking of the flesh—but **MAN WILL NOT RECEIVE IT.** He wants someone else to blame. The popular conception is that men are basically good and the devil is to blame. But Paul says:

*"In ME, that is, IN MY FLESH, dwelleth **no good thing**" (Rom. 7:18).*

He is analyzing his natural state. So John says (1 Jn. 5:19)—

"The WHOLE WORLD lieth in wickedness"

This is why a true conception of the devil leads us logically to another fundamental doctrine—**separation from the world and all its customs and thinking** as embodied particularly in popular Christianity, which is made up principally of the flesh-pleasing inventions of men—beautiful customs, beautiful ceremonies, beautiful empty thoughts full of sentiment without any truth or solid godly value in them—

"ALL that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world "

Jesus said to the Jews—

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye do" (John 8:44).

The lusts of the flesh—the lusts of the devil;

The works of the flesh—the works of the devil;

The destruction of the flesh—the destruction of the devil;

The deceitfulness of the flesh—the wiles of the devil—

Can we miss the force of these repeated scriptural parallels?

"To be carnally (fleshly) minded is death" (Rom. 8:6).

"The wisdom of this world is earthly, sensual, devilish."

The word "sensual" here is psuchikos—soulish, translated "natural" in the expression, *"There is a natural body."*

"Earthly—natural—devilish." The devil is not unearthly or supernatural—he is the **earthly, natural mind of the flesh**. Let us not be ignorant of his devices and waste our efforts beating the air for some supernatural phantom to blame our faults on.

Consider another passage in James (4:1)—

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your members?"

"Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, "The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy" (verse 5).

Then compare verse 7—

"Resist the Devil and he will flee from you"

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts—war comes from the spirit of lust that dwells in us—resist the devil and he will flee from you.

This latter passage is one of the most important statements in all Scripture.

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"Then shall he say to them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (or messengers)' " (Matt 25:41).

This takes us forward to the great consummation portrayed in that book of symbol and imagery, the Revelation. The connection of thought will illustrate the scriptural use and meaning of devil (Rev. 20:10)—

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where

the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

And verse 14—

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire."

So we have the devil, and the beast, and the false prophet, and death, and hell, ALL cast into a lake of fire.

Death and hell could not be literally thrown into a lake of fire. Death is an abstract conception—not a material object. Neither are the beast and the false prophet literal creatures.

All this is symbolism, as the Revelation plainly tells us, and the devil is part of the symbolism.

This devil of the Revelation, which we can see is the same devil as that of Matt 25:41, first appears in chapter 12. This chapter is quoted to support the personal devil theory of an angel cast out of heaven.

Consider this chapter: a woman clothed with the sun—the moon under her feet—a great red dragon, called the devil and satan, having seven heads and ten horns casting down a third part of the stars with its tail and waiting to devour the child of the woman—then war in heaven—the dragon cast out—he casts a flood of water out of his mouth to drown the woman—the earth opens up and swallows the flood and the woman is given eagle's wings to flee from the dragon.

And all this, which is specifically said to symbolize political affairs on the earth, is taken as a strictly literal account to teach the personal devil theory! This is one of its greatest strongholds.

But far from supporting the personal devil theory—it COMPLETELY DESTROYS IT, for it clearly shows who and what the devil really is. Who is this great red seven-headed, ten-horned dragon, that old serpent called the devil and satan? HERE WE HAVE HIM FACE TO FACE. Let us study him well. Let us get the true picture. We see him in his much advertised fall from heaven. The personal devil believers take us to this chapter—let us stop and look around a little.

We find this dragon idea takes various forms through the subsequent chapters of the Revelation, but his color, his ten horns, and his seven heads continue with him. Then in 17:9, we read—

"Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth."

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings."

"And the woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (verse 18).

The dragon of the Revelation—this great dreadful devil of orthodoxy—dissolves, upon investigation, into a POLITICAL CARTOON! His heads are mountains, his horns are kings, his woman is a city, and that city is ROME!

No wonder Rome has invented a supernatural devil to divert attention from her alliance with the Apocalyptic dragon, and all the churches who have sprung from her—and are now rapidly gravitating back—have perpetuated the deception.

Not that the Roman Catholic system comprises this devil in its entirety. But, especially

during the period to which the vision refers, it was the center of the political power of the diabolos or opposition to God.

In the Apocalyptic drama, Rome is the great antagonist to the people and truth of God. It is the great enemy, deceiver and accuser. It is the "God of this world;" for long actually, and still claiming to be, the ruler of the kings of the earth—the center and head of the kingdoms of the world—the drunken rider of the scarlet beast—the political apex and supreme enthronement of the mind of the flesh.

But—what happens to the personal devil theory when we let the Revelation explain itself?

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IN ACTS 10:38, Peter says that Jesus went about healing all that were oppressed of the devil. This corresponds with Jesus' own statement that a woman with a disease was "bound by Satan." The orthodox explanation of this is in direct conflict with God's own statement (Deut. 32:39)—

"I wound and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand."

"I am the Lord and there is none else. I make peace and create evil" (Isa. 45:6-7).

As a separate personal agent, a devil creating disease conflicts with the statements and powers of God. But as **sin in the flesh**, the devil is the root and cause of all evil—

"By man sin entered the world, and DEATH BY SIN."

And not only death, but all the evils that are inseparably associated with it. *"Oppressed of the devil"* means subject to the physical afflictions and miseries that the reign of sin has brought upon the human race—

"The corruption that is in the world through lust."

Parallel passages—the expression of the same thought in different words—form one of the best methods of determining the meaning of questioned phrases. In Eph. 4:27, we find—

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil (diabolos)"

The whole picture is one of self-control—a restraining of the natural impulses. Paul says elsewhere (Rom. 13:14)—

"Make not provision for the flesh."

Give not place to the devil: make no provisions for the flesh.

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MANY things said about Sin indicate that IT is the great enemy spoken of as the devil. In Rom. 6:19-20 Paul counsels against being the "servants of Sin." Also Rom. 6:12—

"Let not Sin reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

NOTICE THE CONSTANT PERSONIFICATION OF SIN as a master and ruler—

"Sin hath reigned unto death ..."

"Sin shall not have dominion over you ..."

"His servants ye are whom ye obey, whether sin or righteousness" (Rom. 6:16).

Notice too that it is "**Sin**" here that fills the exact position of the "**Devil**" elsewhere. The

Law was given, says Paul—

"That Sin might become exceedingly sinful."

Or as in the original—

"That Sin might be an exceeding great Sinner."

Compare John 13:27—

"Satan entered in to Judas."

With Rom. 7:17—

"SIN dwelleth in me."

And Rom. 6:12—

*"Let not Sin reign **in your mortal bodies.**"*

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NOW WE come to a passage that throws much light on the meaning of devil (Heb. 2:14)—

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise (that is, Jesus) took part of the same that through death he might destroy (or bring to nothing) him that hath the power of death, that is, the DEVIL."

Here are two important points. First, that Jesus had to be of flesh and blood and had to die to destroy the devil; and second, that the devil has the power of death.

Supposing the devil to be a supernatural personal being, a fallen angel defying God, this passage presents an inexplicable problem. Why need Jesus be of weak flesh-and-blood to destroy him, and how can a supernatural ENEMY of God have the "power of death"? God Himself alone, as He declares, has the power of life and death.

But understanding the scriptural devil as the mind of the flesh—the motions of sin in the human body—that, unless conquered inevitably lead to death—we can see that it was essential for Christ to be of flesh and blood to overcome it and, as a victorious representative of the race, to break its death-hold on the race and open a way to life for all who are in him and covered by him. The above passage in Hebrews is worded this way in Rom. 8:3—

"God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, CONDEMNED SIN IN THE FLESH."

Again see the striking and revealing parallel: *"Destroyed the devil"—"condemned sin in the flesh."* His victory over sin, his successful lifelong battle against the flesh, crowned by his obedient death, **condemned sin to certain destruction**—"destroyed the devil"—for through that victory in God's plan sin is to be finally abolished from the universe—

"He died unto sin ONCE."

He must die, because he was of the nature in which sin dwelt and which was condemned to death because of sin, but because he has waged a perfect fight against that sin that dwelt within him, never yielding to it in the slightest degree, Peter says (Acts 2:24)—

"Death could not hold him."

His death in obedience to God was the completion of his victory over sin—

"BY DEATH he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

His death marked the end of the battle with sin, and he was the victor. THIS picture is beautiful, harmonious and inspiring. The application to us is made by Paul (1 Cor. 15:55)—

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . .

(Again note personification).

"The sting of death is sin ... but thanks be to God Who hath given us the victory through Jesus Christ."

And again, (Rom. 6:6)—

"Our Old Man (more personification) is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin."

Who is this "Old Man?" SIN PERSONIFIED—the devil—the flesh—condemned, destroyed and nailed to the cross. The name "Jesus" means "Savior," because, said the angel (Matt. 1:21)—

"He shall save his people FROM THEIR SINS."

THAT is the enemy—the devil, the adversary—they are to be saved from.

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NOW the second point—

"Him that hath the power of death, the devil."

IT IS UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THIS TO BE TRUE AND THE DEVIL TO BE A PERSON.

The power of death is the final power. **God would be reduced to nothing if another being opposed to Him had the power of death.** God says—

"I KILL, I MAKE ALIVE."

"The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up"
(1 Sam. 2:6).

Paul says (Rom. 13:1)—

"There is NO POWER BUT OF GOD."

How then could God's great enemy possibly have the "power of death"?

But when we realize that the Scriptures are speaking of the principle of opposition to God, and not a separate being with actual power in his hands over other beings, all is harmonious. Sin truly HAS the power of death. This WAS destroyed in the death of Christ.

What do the Scriptures say about sin having the power of death? Much. Consider Rom 7:

"For when we were in the flesh (that is, served the flesh) the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."

"Sin deceived me and slew me."

(Again, personification).

"Sin working death" (verse 13).

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (verse 23).

"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This chapter goes to the literal root of the matter. Read it carefully—GET A PICTURE OF THE REAL ENEMY—AND THE DEVIL AS A SUPERNATURAL MONSTER VANISHES FOREVER.

Other Scriptures add their testimony to indict the inherent law of sin within our members as the holder of the power of death—

"Sin bringeth forth death."

"The sting of death is sin."

"The wages of sin is death"

"Sin hath reigned unto death" (Rom. 5:21).

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JESUS called Peter "SATAN" on one occasion, because, said Jesus, Peter savored of the things that be of MEN (Mark 8:33). Note the significance of this—satanism, according to Jesus, is **unenlightened human reasoning**, however well-meant.

"Satan" is another common word, meaning "adversary" and very often so translated. Of itself, it does not carry a bad sense, and on one occasion an angel doing God's will is a satan (Num. 22:22—original) and on another, God Himself (compare 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chr. 21:1).

But usually it is used, particularly in the New Testament, as an adversary to God and all that is good, and therefore synonymous with diabolos, the thinking of the flesh.

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WE HAVE seen that eternal life depends on two things—first becoming part of Christ and thus included in his victory, over Sin, the scriptural Devil, and second, completely transferring our allegiance from being servants of Sin or the Devil to being servants of righteousness—that is, setting our course according to the specific commands of the Spirit rather than the natural promptings of the flesh. How this is set in motion is described by Paul (Rom. 6:3)—

"As many as are baptized into Christ are baptized 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, so we also should walk in the newness of life."

The call is, "Believe and be baptized." Be buried by baptism, symbolically marking a death to the service of the Devil Sin, whose wages is death, and arise to newness of life in Christ, henceforth to bend every effort to render faithful and intelligent obedience to the life-giving instructions of the Spirit.

—G. V. Growcott, The Berean Christadelphian, April, 1963