

Who is our enemy?

Adventists are blessed with incredible insights into the struggle between God and Satan. Our enemy is a real, literal, personal being, a fallen angel from the glories of heaven, who has engaged in relentless war against Jesus Christ and subsequently against His disciples.

Satan is described in the Scriptures as follows:

1. Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air (Eph. 2.2).
2. Prince of this world (John 14.30).
3. god of this world (2 Cor. 4.4).
4. Prince of demons (Matt. 12.24).
5. The Hinderer (1 Thess. 2.18).
6. The Accuser (Rev. 12.9-11).
7. Liar and Father of Lies (John 8.44).
8. Angel of Light (2 Cor. 11.14-15).
9. The Tempter (1 Thess. 3.5).
10. A roaring lion (1 Peter 5.8-9).
11. A murderer (John 8.44).

Despite these fearsome titles, Satan is a defeated enemy! He goes around with great wrath, for he himself knows that his time is short (Rev. 12.12). Jesus saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven to earth when the disciples ministered in divine strength (Luke 10.17-20). Jesus has promised us the same victory today (John 16.33). The Apostle Paul experienced this victory in Christ and wrote about it to the church at Rome (Rom. 8.28), and the Apostle John promised Satan's final defeat (1 John 3.8, Rev. 20.10)!

Yes, Satan is powerful and cruel and utterly evil, with no redeeming trait of any kind. Yet, we are not to be afraid. "Thanks be to God! He has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15.57).

How does Satan attack the Persecuted Church? Overt attacks....

We see in the New Testament that Satan used five external pressure sources to bring about overt attacks on the early Church. These early strategies for overt attack are also manifest today.

1) Civic rulers. Pontius Pilate, Herod Agrippa (who murdered the Apostle James in Jerusalem, Acts 12.2), and Nero were the most obvious examples of civil rulers who persecuted the Apostolic Church. Modern-day equivalents would be Ceaucescu of Romania, Mao Tse Tung of China, the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, Fidel Castro of Cuba, the Iranian ayatollahs, Kim Jong Un of North Korea, and the Politburo of the USSR.

2) Religious leaders. It was the Jewish priestly class who were most directly involved in demanding and pushing for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and Peter was direct with the Jewish audience at Pentecost about their portion of responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion ("this Jesus, whom you crucified", Acts 2.36). Throughout His ministry, Jesus' bitterest opponents were the Jewish religious leaders, a theme which is particularly emphasized in John. The first flogging of disciples took place under the Sanhedrin (Acts 5.40), the first martyrdom was carried out by enraged Jewish clerics (Acts 7.54-59), and the Apostle Paul began his career as a religious cleric seeking to destroy the Apostolic Church. Not all religious leaders were persecutors, e.g. Nicodemus or Simon the Pharisee, and many of the priests were baptized after Pentecost, but the faithful stand of these individuals does not deny the greater reality which was the implacable hatred of the Jewish priestly class towards Jesus and His disciples. Modern-day equivalents would be mullahs across the Muslim world who preach hate towards Christians and stir up mobs to attack Christians, their homes and businesses.

3) Business leaders. These tend to oppose Christianity when it is perceived as a threat to their businesses. The most obvious examples of business people persecuting the Apostles are the story of the possessed slave-girl whom Paul delivered (Acts 16) and the silversmiths of Ephesus (Acts 19). Acts reveals that the owners of the slave-girl were not concerned about spiritual truth per se, but primarily about the impact on their business of Paul delivering the slave-girl. "But when the owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities" (Acts 16.19). Modern-day equivalents would be the pro-LGBT businesses such as Pay-Pal, Apple and the NBA.

4) Mobs. When an elite group cannot get the civil authorities to persecute Christians, they may motivate a mob to attack the Christians. A mob can be easily swayed by the fierce rhetoric of clerics, and are often willing to maim, injure or even kill, often with the prospect of booty. The Jews formed a mob in Thessalonica to counter the Apostles' influence (Acts 17.5). Modern-day equivalents would be the mobs who attack Christians in Pakistan and Indonesia, and the social media attacks in the USA on those who hold to biblical parameters for marriage and gender.

5) Families. Jesus experienced rejection from His own brothers and community of Nazareth (Matt. 13.57, John 1.11)). Rejection by a family member goes back to Abel's murder by Cain (Gen. 4). Jeremiah's own family tried to murder him (Jer. 12.6), and Jesus explicitly taught that accepting Him may cause someone to lose their family (Matt. 10.35-36). Many converts to Jesus Christ today face explicit and violent threats from their family and extended families, mostly in communities with a dominant religious group other than Christianity.

Satan also attacks God's Church through the following overt ways:

- 1) Isolating Christians, e.g. through arrest, expulsion or enforced dispersion.
- 2) Creating conflict among Christians.
- 3) Attacks from local dominant faith leaders and faith groups / mobs.
- 4) Religious nationalism, in which Satan inspires civic leaders to try and force Christians to return to their "ancestral" or "former" religions or the pagan gods of their ancestors, all in the name of patriotism or nationalism.
- 5) Secular humanism, which proclaims tolerance but is profoundly intolerant of Christians and the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ.
- 6) Anti-conversion laws.
- 7) Strict controls over approved worship centers.
- 8) Anti-blasphemy laws, often enforced by mobs rather than by the local judiciary.
- 9) Economic discrimination.
- 10) Martyrdom.
- 11) Abductions and forced marriages for Christian girls.
- 12) Upholding God-less ideologies.
- 13) Neutralizing the Christian witness through closing all churches, closing all Christian institutions and ministries, cutting off links with Christians in other countries, forbidding travel by Christians, closing access to financial facilities for Christians, and "re-educating" and indoctrinating Christians and their children etc.

How does Satan attack the Persecuted Church? Internal attacks....

Satan attacks the Persecuted Church in many overt ways, e.g. imprisonments, beheadings, physical assaults etc.

However, a particularly insidious form of attack is on the internal spiritual lives of Christians who are experiencing external overt persecution. Satan isolates persecuted disciples from the Body of Christ, and then attacks them with discouragement, by pointing out our personal sins, and playing on every selfish motivation he can. Feedback from the Persecuted Church indicates the following particularly acute attacks of Satan:

1. **Pride.** We all need to overcome pride, which was Satan's own initial sin and which is his pervasive and constant attack against Christians. The appeal to pride in Eden ("You will be like God", Gen. 3.5) was one of the first lies ever told. Prov. 6.17 reveals that "haughty eyes" are an abomination to God, and Jesus spoke of pride and self-exaltation when He said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
2. **True guilt.** Satan accuses us in our own hearts of our sins and mistakes. One reason this strategy is so successful in discouraging the saints is because it is partially true. We are indeed sinners, and there is much that Satan can accuse us of! When he accuses, we know in our hearts that there is much truth in his accusations. Paul warned Timothy that in the last days, many professing Christians will be living wickedly (3 Tim. 3.1-7), and will be living with unresolved guilt. God has provided a means for full forgiveness when we confess our sins (2 Tim. 1.9), and Psalm 51 reveals the joy of forgiveness. According to Rev. 12.11, believers counter and overcome the accusations of Satan in 3 ways: a) by the blood of the Lamb; b) by the word of their testimony; and c) by their sacrificial love one for another.

3. False guilt. This comes from the judgments and standards of men, when we put too much confidence in the opinions of men rather than what the Word of God teaches. When disciples face persecution, their leaders are discredited and imprisoned, their churches closed, their institutions taken from them, they generally ask, “Why?” Satan is always present with answers, that their faith was weak, that they did not pray enough, that their sins demanded God’s punishment. When believers are forced to meet in houses secretly, or in parks, they wonder whether what they are doing is really worship, whether their prayer sessions, however brief, are valid, and whether their Bible study, if only a discussion of a memorized text, is valid in God’s eyes. Satan floods the minds of believers with such questions and then immediately provides negative answers. This is a burden of false guilt that drains spiritual energy and accomplishes nothing. Satan wants us to concentrate on the past (false guilt) or the future (a debilitating sense of foreboding). Christ wants us to focus on the present, confess and claim full forgiveness, and live for Him today.

4. Fear. It is natural to be afraid of many things. Most people have a sense of fear about death and how they will die. There is a fear to speak up in times of persecution for fear the persecution will fall upon us personally. There is the fear of the unknown, or of how we will respond in times of crisis. How do we combat fear? By remembering the following 4 key truths: First, God is in control – He will only allow us to experience what is best for us (Phil. 4.6-7, Acts 27.23-25); Second, we are only pilgrims and strangers on this earth. Our real home is heaven, and some of us may be called to our rest in anticipation of the 2nd Coming sooner than we expect. We must be ready (Heb. 10.32-39); Third, God always brings good from evil (Rom. 8.28, Gen. 50.20); And fourth, the enemy can only harm our bodies, not our eternal destiny (Lk. 12.4-5). Jesus commanded us to set our priorities straight when He said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10.28).

5. Materialism. Satan subtly promotes the attitude that says money, property, possessions, physical comforts, worldly fame and honor are the most important things in life. The prosperity we have is freely given to us by God, is indeed a blessing until it takes the place of God. Materialism is thus the attitude that says money, property, possessions, physical comforts, fame and honor are the most important things in life. This is not to say, “There is no God” but “I have no need of God.” A church leader from Romania lamented on this topic, “In my experience, 95% of the believers who face the test of external persecution will pass it, while 95% of those who face the test of prosperity fail it.” Like fire, money is a good servant but a destructive master. Materialism is a seductive power, it can cause people to do almost anything, the hearts of the wealthy are often hardened to the needs of the poor, mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us, money is insatiable, and by God’s grace, it can be overcome.