

Beacons of the Bible

The Serpent

By [Henry Law](#)

1869

"The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field."--Genesis 3:1

Evil is universally present. It lives in every climate--in every age--in every heart. There is no place exempt. Every soil is profuse with its luxuriance. Each period is its era. Other things vary; but, in all varieties this uniformity prevails. While great diversity marks the intellect, and powers, and characters of men, each and all breathe this common atmosphere, and wear this common dress.

The thought naturally arises, "How could this monster first spring into life? Who is the author of its being? Where is its cradle?" It is, however, the part of wisdom quickly to check enquiries, which might exercise forever, but must forever elude, our search. The mystery of sin's birth is shrouded in impenetrable clouds. It lies beneath unfathomable depths. It sits above heights inaccessible. The dreadful story is buried from our sight. The secret is not unveiled on earth. It is vain, then, to grope in darkness. It is folly to speculate, when the utmost gain must be disappointment. Thought and time are lost, when we pursue a fleeting phantom. They, who pass from guess to guess on this subject, find that their progress is from ignorance to ignorance. How sin gained its first breath must be unknown, until the day of larger revelations.

But while we give no heed to speculations, which only darken knowledge, it becomes us to ponder reverently the revelations of our Bible. We have a record of sin's descent upon our world. Its introduction into man's heart is related. The story indeed is brief. Only a few black lines are drawn. The full portrait is not filled up. But the dreadful transaction is disclosed--and it affects us too closely to permit indifference. Let us, then, draw near, with solemn minds. And may the one great Spirit of eternal truth guide our feet into rich pastures of sanctifying wisdom!

Creation, springing from the Creator's hand, was perfect. It was worthy of the all-good Maker. "God created man in his own image--in the image of God created he him:" Genesis 1:27. "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good," Genesis 1:31. The wisdom, love, and power of God could not have raised a fairer fabric.

Thus Eden's garden surpassed improvement. Our first parents--pure in holiness--rich in every grace--the unsullied reflection of God's own nature--moved amid perfect scenes. The glory of their state was this, they were the image of God. This was the glory of their dwelling, God pronounced it to be "very good." Thus earth needed not accession of delight. Man joyed in all around him--all within him--all above him. Around was every charm--within was happy innocence--above was a smiling Father. God was everywhere--in everything.

Believer, while you marvel at this dazzling brightness, remember, there is something inconceivably better in store for you--bless God for your heavenly hope.

Eden's sun is soon eclipsed. This bright day soon darkens. The flowers of this garden soon fade. Into this Paradise the Serpent comes. Simple are the words which introduce the monster. "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." He appears--and his work soon betrays him. The work is subtle evil. This fact alone establishes that he is more than his assumed form pretends. In semblance he is one of the beautiful creatures, sporting in this garden's paths. But they are irrational, gifted only with the limited powers of instinct. But here is one, who, seeming to be a serpent, uses speech, and reasons with consummate skill, and evidences the depths of evil. He must be more than mere serpent, who has more than a serpent's powers and wiles. Thus the conclusion is approached, that the devil, to accomplish his vile ends, hides himself beneath this mask--clothes himself in this shape--decks himself with the unsuspected features of a creature of Paradise.

The Spirit of God attests this fact. Speaking of the devil, He names him "old serpent." Unveiling some of the terrific wonders of the last days, He says, "The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan" Rev. 12:9. And again, "I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand--and he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." 20:1, 2. The Spirit, foreshowing Satan's ruin, names him, as the creature in whose form he here appears. The old Serpent, which shall be destroyed, is the devil. The old Serpent, then, which crept into Paradise, is the devil.

Paul adds his heaven-taught confirmation. Surely the devil is before his eye, when he warns the Corinthians, "lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety," so their minds should be corrupted. 2 Cor. 11:3.

Thus the disguise drops--the mask falls--the veil is withdrawn--the deception is detected--the plot is discovered--the sleight is discerned--the treachery is disclosed--the trickery is visible. This is no harmless creature. This is not one of a beautiful tribe, ignorant of evil. This agent belongs not to a race of living ones, declared by God to be "very good."

Here is the devil--that apostate spirit--that accursed being--that arch-rebel--that daring adversary of God--that merciless foe of man. Eden's Serpent truly is the devil. His work declares him. God's word denounces him.

Taking, then, our stand upon this indisputable fact, let us humbly pray the great Teacher of the Church to press upon our hearts the obvious warnings.

1. The devil is a real person.

The devil is no myth--no dream--no vision--no fable--no allegory. It narrates the real conduct of a real person. It is no fictitious tale. It is not amusement for imaginative minds. It is no stage, on which imagination may blow bubbles. All is historic verity and unvarnished fact. Here are the doings of an actual living being. As God truly is--and Christ truly is--and the Holy Spirit truly is--and we truly are--just so the devil truly is. Works prove a workman. Acts show an agent. So real performances stamp a real devil.

Reader! these are days in which proud reason sneers at ancient verities, and regards Bible-statements as materials for the construction of airy palaces of conceit. Be not deceived. As the Serpent beguiled Eve, so now he beguiles unstable minds. As he persuaded her to view him as a friendly counselor, so he persuades them to regard him as a shadowy semblance of some vague mystery. Listen not to such fond dreams. The Bible begins not with enigmas. It is not constructed to puzzle and perplex. Trifle not with the faithful statement but be assured, that there is no truth more tremendously true, than the existence of a personal devil. Watch then, and pray. He is always personally near; for he "walks about seeking whom he may devour." 1 Pet. 5:8. Bar the portals of your heart. He seeks to make that heart his personal home. He is the "spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." Eph. 2:2.

2. The devil is a hater of God.

Who hates God most? Surely he who most contravenes His will. Of the devil's antecedent rebellion, nothing should be said, for nothing can be proved. But here a patent fact evidences his enmity. He aims directly to upset God's plans. He arms himself in the panoply of bold opposition. He sees the divine arrangement, and he sets himself to disarrange it. He views creation bright in every beauty, and he plots to soil it. He marks the birth of an eternity of pure delights, and he arises to infuse the element of misery. God had made man in His own likeness. Satan comes forward to destroy the holy image, and to transform the heavenly work into fuel for his hell. He seems to reason--'Man is formed to show forth God's praise, and to be His delight. But this benevolence shall fail. Man shall be robbed of innocence; he shall be debased into a rebel, fallen as I am--an object fit only for abhorrence. Thus he schemes--thus he uplifts his arm boldly to fight

against God. See, then, how he hates God.

Reader! you profess to love God. Where is your evidence? Do you abhor the fiend, who from the beginning has strained his every power to subvert God's kingdom? Do the warm feelings of your heart respond, 'I hate him who hates my God--God's foes are my foes--His friends my friends--I avow myself to be His soldier and His servant--I march beneath the banner of the God of heaven against the legions of the god of this world?'

3. The devil is a hater of man.

Who hates man most? Surely he who most contrives his misery. In Eden there was sweet bliss. Every faculty was the inlet of God. Every thought--full of Him--was only joy. The morning dawned to bring God near. The day advanced to bring Him nearer. The closing evening closed not the communion. Sinless man lived in the raptures of heavenly converse. His breast was cloudless sunshine. Satan beholds and writhes-- "What! shall man share the peace which I have lost; and rejoice in joys, which never can be mine again?" Such bliss is torture to him. He will not rest until he uproot it. Such happiness stings him, as a gnawing worm. He must destroy it. He dwells in wretchedness--and he now comes to drag down others to his level. Earth had never heard a sigh nor seen a tear, until this enemy of happiness appeared. Since that day pains and anguish have run a ceaseless course. His aim was to create misery, and mercilessly he succeeded. See, then, how he hated man.

Sad that the sons of men should lend their ears so gladly to their deadliest foe, and drink so readily this viper's poison! What madness to court the embrace of such an enemy--to admit the sure murderer to our abode--to open the door to the known robber! This is their madness, who fondle this hater of our race.

4. The devil is most daring.

Truly nothing daunts him. His case is *hopeless*, therefore he is *reckless*. Paradise was divinely pure, but still undaunted he rushes in. When man was heavenly as heaven, boldly he addresses him. Is he more timid now? Far otherwise. There is no place so pure, that his foot fears to tread it. There is no holiness so holy that he ventures not to touch. His hand will open the sacred gate--his foot will pass the boundary of every sacred enclosure. The sanctity of Jesus scared him not. No heaven-appointed ordinances repel his step. He whispers to the praying saint. He mounts the pulpit-steps. He joins the worshipers in hallowed courts. He is by the side at sacramental feasts. Sacred is the saint's dying chamber; but he shoots his arrows there. His daring cannot be exceeded.

Believer, labor to grow in grace. Each day put on more of the Lord Jesus. Agonize for nearer conformity to His image. Fly with quicker wing to the heights of holiness. But bear in mind, that as you rise, the tempter will pursue you still.

5. The devil is consummate in skill.

He watches for the appropriate opportunity; and then applies the suitable snare. Eve is alone--then he is by her side. In Adam's presence the bait could not be laid. If Adam's counsels could be sought, the bait could not succeed. The only opportunity is adroitly seized.

Next mark the artfully-constructed snare. The object is to introduce sin. Sin is transgression of God's command. Our parents had free permission of full enjoyments. In this permission there is no door for disobedience. But there is one--only one prohibition. If guilt can enter, it must be by this path. The trial shall be made. The seducing words are few; but they comprise all deceitfulness.

A DOUBT is first insinuated. "Has God said?" Is it truly so? There may be some mistake. A spark to kindle DISCONTENT next falls. "You shall not eat of every tree." Is this consistent with unbounded kindness? Why this arbitrary limit?--A bold DENIAL of danger follows. "You shall not surely die." It is a futile threat. A promise of abundant gain crowns the lure. "Your eyes shall be opened." The skill is perfect.

Reader! beware. He, who tempts you this day, has not declined in subtlety. No, the experience of long ages, if possible, sharpens his cunning. The school of incessant practice teaches him to cast the net more craftily. He ever has been, and ever will be, matchless in deception.

6. The devil shrinks not from the blackest sin.

His first appearance shows that there is no iniquity so foul, but he will handle it; no depth of evil so profound, but he will fathom it. He commences with trampling down all truth. "You shall not surely die." He rises upon earth the meridian orb of crime. He blushes not--nor trembles--nor pauses--nor scruples. His earliest words are the lie of lies. So now he allures each victim to the extremest extremity of evil. He never will forbear, while he can plunge them deeper in sin's abyss. The vilest iniquities are most congenial to his nature. Reader! go not one step with him. There is no finality in his downward course.

7. The devil has dreadful power.

Weak agents fail. Difficulties baffle them. But Satan is not baffled. His first victory

was hard to win. But he quickly won it. Eve had no inward proneness to yield. No inborn corruption betrayed the portals of her heart. Her citadel was firm in walls and bars of innocence. But still he succeeded. He gained admission, and set up his throne of conquest. Can there be clearer proof of his transcendent powers?

Reader! beware. All his mighty arts plot your destruction. The innocent fell, when attacked only from without. How can you stand, when a legion of traitorous desires are ready to surrender? His outward solicitations are aided by your inward lusts. If you escape, a stronger than this strong one must befriend you.

Such is the Serpent's appearance in Eden. Here the description ceases. Other Scriptures unfold a lengthened roll of his malignant might. As man's history advances, his cruelty and wiles swell into more frightful form. Our annals are a vast catalogue of his foul exploits. The first picture presents only this broad outline. But it is a clear display of his reality--his hatred to God and man--his daring--his skill--his deep iniquity, and his tremendous power.

Believer, you may view him and still smile. This conqueror is conquered. Captivity is led captive. The spoiler is spoiled. This strong one is bound. You are rescued. You are safe. True, he will often assail, affright, roll you in the mire, and wound your peace--but he cannot destroy. His might is great--but your Almighty deliverer is far greater. His hosts are many--your one Jesus Himself is infinitely more. He indeed desires to have you, and his efforts are terrible and incessant; but your Jesus ever lives to pray for you, and His prayers are ever heard. Therefore, go forward, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." Eph. 6:13. Fear not. Fear not, Christ is with you. Be not dismayed, He is your God. Resist this foe, and he will flee. James 4:7. Raise the banner of the cross, and he will tremble. Wash in the blood, and he cannot touch you. Cry to the Captain of Salvation, and all heaven aids you. Thus go on your heavenward way rejoicing. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Rom. 16:20. In Christ you may victoriously shout, "Oh my enemy, your destructions are come to a perpetual end. You have wounded, but Christ has healed. The death brought in by you, brightens through Christ into eternal life."

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).