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## Another Announcer!

The infernal serpent; he it was whos guile, stirr'd up with envy and revenge,  
deceived the mother of mankind.

~John Milton in *Paradise Lost*

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field  
that the Lord God had made.

Genesis 3:1

# TWO

## Another Announcer!

Never before in the history of the world have there been so many voices trying to attract our attention and capture our hearts. In hopes of conscripting our time, talent, and treasure, voices of every type bombard us day and night. Not all of these voices are “bad” in and of themselves. They only become “bad” when they distract us from listening to, looking for, and leaning on God. Remember, even good things can become bad things when they become ultimate things. And that includes the voices we listen to!

So . . . what voices have you been listening to lately?

In today’s culture it is rare to find someone who does not have a cell phone pressed to their ear, listening to someone’s voice. The voice of “texting” is as common as the common cold, even while driving! The voice of media has become a ravenous beast when it comes to trying to get our attention. Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, movies, video games, the internet—many littered with filthy fantasies fighting for our focus, coming at us with a clear and compelling message: “There is something you are missing in your life! We can give to you if you will only *listen!*”

This lie goes all the way back to the Garden . . . when another announcer showed up.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and

made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:1-8)

Here we find the voice of another announcer, a *sinister* soundtrack, who announces to Adam and Eve that God's way of wisdom is not the only way. In fact, Satan's suggestion to Adam and Eve was that God's way of wisdom is not the only way, and it's not the *best* way. Satan implied that there is a way of wisdom that can be achieved independent of God and His revelation: "*You will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"

Adam and Eve, for the first time in human history, were faced with the "choice of voice" and had to decide whom they would trust. Would they listen to the Creator or the creature? Would they follow the promises of God or the pandering of Satan? In a moment that can only be described as a catastrophic cosmic rebellion, they chose to listen to Satan. What they never realized until it was too late was that in listening to Satan they had elected to deny God . . . and in denying God they denied their own divine design! Adam and Eve were designed to listen to, learn from, and lean on God and God alone. Because of their willful act of rebellion against the one and only voice they should have listened to, we now live in a fallen world with innumerable ungodly voices trying to capture our hearts and redirect our destinies.

## **KNOW YOUR OPPONENTS**

I have been involved in athletics and martial arts for nearly three decades. When preparing for a game or a match, one of the most important things coaches and competitors can do is scout their opponent to learn everything possible. The more you can learn about your opponent's strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies, the greater your opportunity for victory. The Bible tells us that we fight our battles against the world, the flesh, and the devil. One particular Scripture passage brings all three into sharp focus:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our

flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Let’s take a brief look at these enemies of the cross. Your toughest opponent may surprise you! How well do you know yourself? That’s right. *You* are your number one opponent. The Bible refers to this opposition as coming from “the body” or “the flesh.”

At first glance, we tend to identify Satan as the primary cause of Adam and Eve’s terrible rebellion in the Garden. He came after Eve and caused her to question the Word of God. But if we look more closely, we see the root cause of their sin was the desire of their own hearts! Sure, they were tempted by the devil. *But the devil did not force Adam and Eve to do anything.* To see the fall of man as merely a response to the temptation of the serpent misses the root of the problem: our own sinful desires.

“Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire,” the Bible explains. “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). Not all desire is bad desire that brings forth death. Some desires are very good; the desire to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love others as ourselves; the desire to live a life of service for the glory of God; the desire to consider others better than yourself; the desire to develop your God-given gifts, talents, and abilities. The desires I am speaking about here are the evil ones that divide the affections of our heart, turning us away from Christ. Satan simply presented Adam and Eve with the opportunity to respond to what their hearts already desired: being the rulers of their own little kingdom. And they jumped at the chance!

Time and time again, Jesus taught that our greatest enemy was within us: “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23). Jesus never minimized the reality of our fight against the devil. He simply made it clear that our biggest problem was within us. Jerry Bridges observed,

It is our own evil desires that lead us into temptation. We may think we merely respond to outward temptations that are presented to us. But the truth is, our evil desires are constantly searching our temptations to satisfy their insatiable lusts. Consider the

particular temptations to which you are especially vulnerable, and note how often you find yourself searching out occasions to satisfy those evil desires.”<sup>1</sup>

Scripture makes it clear that we will never be able to plumb the depths of understanding the waywardness of our hearts. Jeremiah cried, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Genesis 6:5 recalls that “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

As my friend and pastor Tullian often says, “The heart is quick to point out the speck in our brother’s eye, while totally neglecting the log in our own.” The heart is poor in understanding its sickness and blind in seeing its sinfulness. Because of this, the best approach to fighting the opponent within was supplied to us by David: “Search me, O God,” he prayed, “and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). We must ask God to shine the light of His truth into our deceitful hearts and root out the evil intentions that lurk there continually.

The “world” is our next opponent, but only as it relates to the sinful culture. The world is good as it was created by God. God loves this world so much that He sent Jesus to redeem it! What God hates in this world is sin and the corrupted and twisted systems of this world. This sinful aspect of the world wants us to blend in and follow its values and principles. It wants us to violate the admonition of Colossians 2:8, “Let no one take you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the principles of this world, rather than on Christ.” Every time we listen to the wisdom of this world—every time we succumb to the “If it feels good, do it” philosophy that has been the hallmark of American culture for the past forty years—we deny the wisdom of God and fall deeper into the pitiless snare of sin. One day this world will be rescued and renewed, and the groaning will stop. Until that great and glorious day, we are to be vigilant against this enemy and fight against its ungodly influence in our lives.

If we didn’t have our hands full with resisting the sinful desires of the flesh and the sinful siren song of the world, we also have the devil to contend with. If a three-strand cord is not easily broken, a three-front battle is not easily won. And far too many Christian men are blind to the dangers of this

deadly foe. A 2009 survey by George Barna found that 58% of people who described themselves as Christians either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional 8% were not sure what they believed about the existence of Satan.<sup>2</sup>

Most men I meet in the church will say they believe the devil is real. They just don’t act like it in preparing for their fight against him. The apostle Peter understood the opponent he was up against and provided a stern warning for every blood-bought man of God, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Now if that doesn’t light the fire of preparing for the fight . . . your wood’s wet!

Sin did not begin in the Garden with Adam and Eve. It started in heaven in the heart of an angel, the head of all of the created angelic beings, as we read in Revelation 12:7-12.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan knew what he had been created by God to do—to glorify God—and he refused to do it. Instead of glorifying God, Lucifer wanted to be God. So he challenged the Creator’s right to rule His creation . . . and lost. With the freedom of will just like that of man, Satan chose the way of rebellion rather than the way of righteousness. Satan, along with his angels, was thrown out of heaven and down to earth where Satan became the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus confirmed this truth. “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven,” He said (Luke 10:18).

From that moment on, Satan along with his fallen angel allies, has been busily engaged in doing everything within their power (yet only what God allows) to convince the image bearers of God to serve to serve the kingdom of one rather than the Kingdom of the One . . . the little kingdom of self rather than the big kingdom of the Savior . . . the kingdom of man rather than the kingdom of the Master. Things began badly; Satan won the first battle by getting Adam and Eve to buy into the lie of autonomy and self-rule. But we know that Satan has lost the war! John exulted that God's people "have conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Revelation 12:11).

Every Christian man is called to develop an appropriate understanding of our three determined opponents. Satan is a created being, always subject to his creaturely limitations. Omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are qualities that only God possesses. Nevertheless, Satan is a real individual, not some cosmic, unknown, and unnamed force of evil. He is a supernatural being, ceaselessly plotting ways to seduce mankind into following him in the service of "the kingdom of one" instead of the Kingdom of the One. The epithets given to him by Scripture provide insight as to his character.

- Liar
- Accuser
- Murderer
- Tempter
- Evil one
- Father of lies
- Satan
- Devil

Paul's exhortation to don spiritual armor makes it clear that we're in the fight of our lives! "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Make no mistake; Satan is a merciless and powerful enemy. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). Do you recall the pictures you’ve seen of African lions ripping at the carcass of a zebra? That is precisely what Satan desires to do your life and your Christian testimony—to steal your joy, destroy your testimony, and ultimately to kill you! But as I said earlier, Satan is not *all*-powerful. He will press you but he cannot possess you. The Bible makes this truth crystal clear, all the way from the promise in the Garden of Eden to the proclamation on Golgotha’s Hill:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30).

Because of the cross, our enemy is disarmed, defeated and one day will be utterly destroyed. The cross gives us the confidence to confront our opponent head on in the strength of our Lord, knowing that ultimate victory is assured. James wrote, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Satan can do nothing apart from or outside of the knowledge, purpose, and will of Almighty God. The victory is assured, but the battle rages on against the flesh, world, and the devil, until the day Jesus returns to both bind Satan and bless all of His creation, including every child of God.

1. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, pg. 56
2. The Barna Group, "Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," April 10, 2009.





## **BROTHER TO BROTHER**

1. What is the lie the “voices of the world” want us to believe? Where in your life have you been negatively impacted by this lie?

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2. What was the “choice of voice” Adam and Eve faced in the Garden of Eden? Why did they listen to it?

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3. The more you can learn about your opponent’s strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies, the greater your opportunity for victory.  Agree  Disagree Please explain as it relates to Satan.

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4. The Bible says we fight our battles on three fronts. What are they? What Scripture passage brings all three into sharp focus?

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5. On which of the three fronts are you fighting your most difficult battles?

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6. What comfort do you find in the truth that Satan can do nothing apart from or outside of the knowledge, purpose, and will of Almighty God? Please explain.

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7. What victory can you share with the brothers at your table that God has won for you in your battle against the world, flesh, or the devil?

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8. Are we praying, as young Samuel did, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:9)? Or are we listening to voices smaller than God’s?

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