

The Forces That Will Save Us

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I feel impressed to sound a warning voice against the devil and his angels—the source and mainspring of all evil. I approach this prayerfully, because Satan is not an enlightening subject. I consider him to be the great imitator.

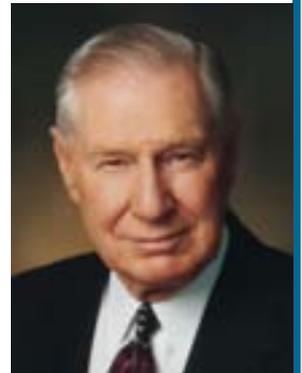
I think we will witness increasing evidence of Satan’s power as the kingdom of God grows stronger. I believe Satan’s ever-expanding efforts are some proof of the truthfulness of this work. In the future the opposition will be both more subtle and more open. It will be masked in greater sophistication and cunning, but it will also be more blatant. We will need greater spirituality to perceive all of the forms of evil and greater strength to resist it. But the disappointments and setbacks to the work of God will be temporary, for the work will go forward.¹

It is not good practice to become intrigued by Satan and his mysteries. No good can come from getting close to evil. Like playing with fire, it is too easy to get burned: “The knowledge of sin tempteth to its commission.”² The only safe course is to keep well distanced from him and any of his wicked activities or

nefarious practices. The mischief of devil worship, sorcery, witchcraft, voodooism, casting spells, black magic, and all other forms of demonism should always be avoided.

However, President Brigham Young (1801–77) said that it is important to “study . . . evil, and its consequences.”³ Since Satan is the author of all the evil in the world, it is essential therefore to realize that he is the influence behind the opposition to the work of God. Alma stated the issue succinctly: “Whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.”⁴

My principal reason for choosing this subject is to help young people by warning them, as Paul said, “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”⁵ We hope that young people, unfamiliar with the sophistries of the world, can keep themselves free of Satan’s enticements and deceitful ways. I personally claim no special insight into Satan’s methods, but I have at times been able to identify his influence and his actions in my life and in the lives of others. When I was on my first mission, Satan sought to divert me from my future path and,



All who come unto Christ by obedience to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel can thwart Satan’s efforts.

DETAIL FROM CHRIST AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER, BY HEINRICH HOFMANN, COURTESY OF C. HARRISON CONROY CO.; PHOTOGRAPH BY BUSATH PHOTOGRAPHY



The Prophet Joseph Smith related from his own experience, “The nearer a person approaches the Lord, a greater power will be manifested by the adversary to prevent the accomplishment of His purposes.”

if possible, to destroy my usefulness in the Lord’s work. That was more than 60 years ago, and I still remember how reasonable his entreaties seemed.

Satan’s Enticing Appeal

Who has not heard and felt the enticing of the devil? His voice often sounds so reasonable and his message so easy to justify. It is an appealing, intriguing voice with dulcet tones. It is neither hard nor discordant. No one would listen to Satan’s voice if it sounded harsh or mean. If the devil’s voice were unpleasant, it would not persuade people to listen to it.

Shakespeare wrote, “The prince of darkness is a gentleman,”⁶ and, “The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.”⁷ As the great imitator, Lucifer has marvelous powers of deception. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”⁸

Some of Satan’s most appealing lines are “Everyone does it”; “If it doesn’t hurt anybody else, it’s all right”; “If you feel all right about it, it’s OK”; or “It’s the ‘in’ thing to do.” These subtle entreaties make Satan the great imitator, the master deceiver, the arch counterfeiter, and the great forger.

We all have an inner braking system that will stop us before we follow Satan too far down the wrong road. It is the still, small voice within us. But if we allow ourselves to succumb to Satan’s tempting, the braking system begins to leak brake fluid and our stopping mechanism becomes weak and ineffective.

Nephi has given to us the pattern or formula by which Satan operates:

“And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.

“And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.”⁹

The First Presidency described Satan: “He is working under such perfect disguise that many do not recognize either him or his methods. There is no crime he would not commit, no debauchery he would not set up, no plague he would not send, no heart he would not break, no life he would not take, no soul he would not destroy. He comes as a thief in the night; he is a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”¹⁰ Satan is the world’s master in the use of flattery, and he knows the great power of speech, a power his servants often employ.¹¹ He has always been one of the great forces of the world.

I once heard Ernest LeRoy Hatch, former president of the Guatemala City temple, say, “The devil is not smart because he is the devil; he is smart because he is old.” Indeed, the devil is old, and he was not always the devil. Initially, he was not the perpetrator of evil. He was with the hosts of heaven in the beginning. He was “an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God.”¹² He came before Christ and proposed to God the Father, “Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.”¹³ This he wanted to do by force, destroying the agency of man.

Satan became the devil by seeking glory, power, and dominion by force.¹⁴ In contrast, Jesus, chosen “from the beginning,” said unto God, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.”¹⁵ What a difference in approaches! Wrong as Satan was, he was persuasive enough to entice one-third of the hosts of heaven to follow him.¹⁶ He practiced a great deception by saying, “I am also a son of God,”¹⁷ persuading others to love him more than God.

Agency—Our Alternative

Our agency, given us through the plan of our Father, is the great alternative to Satan’s plan of force. With this sublime gift, we can grow, improve, progress, and seek perfection.

Without agency, none of us could grow and develop by learning from our mistakes and errors and those of others.

Because of his rebellion, Lucifer was cast out and “became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto [the Lord’s] voice.”¹⁸ And so this personage who was an angel of God and in authority, even in the presence of God, was removed from the presence of God and His Son.¹⁹ This caused great sadness, “for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer, a son of the morning.”²⁰ Does this not place some responsibility on the followers of Christ to show concern for loved ones who have lost their way and “are shut out from the presence of God”?²¹ I know of no better way than to show unconditional love and help lost souls seek another path.

Satan does, however, perform an important negative function. In the book of 2 Nephi we are told, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.”²² Indeed, Peter warns, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”²³

C. S. Lewis, a Christian author, gave us a keen insight into devilish tactics. In a fictional letter, the master devil, Screwtape, instructs the apprentice devil Wormwood, who is in training to become a more experienced devil:

“You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. . . . It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. . . . Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”²⁴

C. S. Lewis also wrote: “A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. . . . You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down.”²⁵

The Prophet Joseph Smith related from his own experience, “The nearer a person approaches the Lord,

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a greater power will be manifested by the adversary to prevent the accomplishment of His purposes.”²⁶

Our Defense: Stand Firm

However, we need not become paralyzed with fear of Satan’s power. He can have no power over us unless we permit it. He is really a coward, and if we stand firm, he will retreat. The Apostle James counseled: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”²⁷ He cannot know our thoughts unless we speak them. And Nephi states that the devil “hath no power over the hearts” of righteous people.²⁸ We have heard comedians and others justify or explain their misdeeds by saying, “The devil made me do it.” I do not really think the devil can make us do anything. Certainly he can tempt and he can deceive, but he has no authority over us that we do not give him.

The power to resist Satan may be stronger than we realize. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”²⁹

He also stated, “Wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed.”³⁰ So Satan and his angels are not all-powerful. One of Satan’s approaches is to persuade a person who has transgressed that there is no hope of forgiveness. But there is always hope. Most sins, no matter how grievous, may be repented of if the desire is sincere enough.

Discerning Evil

Satan has had great success with this gullible generation. As a consequence, he and his angels have victimized literally

hosts of people. There is, however, an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift comes undeviatingly by personal revelation to those who strive to obey the commandments of the Lord and to follow the counsel of the living prophets.

This personal revelation will surely come to all whose eyes are single to the glory of God, for it is promised that their bodies will be “filled with light, and there shall be no darkness” in them.³¹ All who come unto Christ by obedience to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel can thwart Satan’s efforts. The humble followers of the divine Master need not be deceived by the devil if they will be honest and true to their fellow men and women, go to the house of the Lord, receive the sacrament worthily, observe the Sabbath day, pay their tithes and offerings, offer contrite prayers, engage in the Lord’s work, and follow those who preside over them.

There are forces that will save us from the ever-increasing lying, disorder, violence, chaos, destruction, misery, and deceit that are upon the earth. Those saving forces are the everlasting principles, covenants, and ordinances of the eternal gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. These same principles, covenants, and ordinances are coupled with the rights and powers of the priesthood of Almighty God. We of this Church are the possessors and custodians of these commanding powers that can and do roll back much of the power of Satan on the earth. We believe that we hold these mighty forces in trust for all who have died, for all who are now living, and for the yet unborn.

My prayer is that through the spreading of righteousness, the evil hands of the destroyer can be stayed so that he will not be permitted to curse the whole world. I pray that God will overlook our weaknesses, our frailties, and our many shortcomings and generously forgive us of our misdeeds. May He bring solace to the suffering, comfort to those who grieve, and peace to the brokenhearted. ■

NOTES

1. See D&C 3:1; 65:2.
2. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 373.
3. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1941), 257.
4. Alma 5:40.
5. 2 Corinthians 2:11.
6. *King Lear*, act 3, scene 4, line 148.
7. *The Merchant of Venice*, act 1, scene 3, line 99.
8. 2 Corinthians 11:14; see also 2 Nephi 9:9.
9. 2 Nephi 28:21–22.
10. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 6:179.
11. See Jacob 7:4.
12. D&C 76:25.
13. Moses 4:1.
14. See Moses 4:3–4.
15. Moses 4:2.
16. See Revelation 12:4; D&C 29:36.
17. Moses 5:13.
18. Moses 4:4.
19. See D&C 76:25.
20. D&C 76:26.
21. See Moses 6:49.
22. 2 Nephi 2:11.
23. 1 Peter 5:8.
24. *The Screwtape Letters* (1961), 56.
25. *Mere Christianity* (1960), 124.
26. In Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 132.
27. James 4:7.
28. See 1 Nephi 22:26.
29. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (1980), 60.
30. *History of the Church*, 4:576.
31. D&C 88:67.

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Ask family members to imagine they are sitting around a fire. Talk about the dangers of playing with fire. How is this like becoming “intrigued by Satan and his mysteries”? Share some of President Faust’s examples of how we can overcome Satan’s deceptions. Challenge the family to be righteous examples in thwarting his plans.
2. Bring a small toy car, a picture of a car, or have the family look at a car nearby. What would happen if someone were driving and the brakes failed? Cite President Faust’s example of our own inner braking system. Testify of the importance of strengthening our sensitivity to the Holy Ghost and heeding the still, small voice to combat the devil.
3. Using the article, write down some of Satan’s devices and some of the spiritual tools we have to combat Satan. Talk with family members about the devil’s tactics, and explain that we have the power to defeat him. Testify that righteous living can thwart Satan.