

Fellowship with God

Until the Spirit was given, no one possessed what Paul called the “mind of Christ” (1Cor. 2:16), who alone had fellowship with God. Jesus’ followers could not have understood him when he declared, “No one really knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone really know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son may choose to reveal Him” (Mt. 11:27b), but as with everything Jesus spoke, it was the truth. And all wise men pray that the Son will choose to reveal the Father to them.

We continue now with other biblical stories in which Satan was involved, reading them the way ancient people read them, seeing Satan having fellowship with God as a stern and obedient servant, not as an enemy of righteousness.

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and the High Priest

Heaven’s Accuser

The young prophet Zechariah was given a vision of a trial as it took place in heaven. On trial was Joshua, Israel’s high priest, who had in some unstated way transgressed the law. Although his life, maybe even his soul, hung in the balance, the high priest himself, down on earth, may not even have known that this heavenly trial was taking place.

Zechariah 3

1. Then the angel showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.
2. And the LORD [speaking through His angel] said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan, even the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand [a scorched stick of wood] plucked out of the fire?”
3. Now, Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and he stood before the angel.
4. And the angel of the LORD answered and spoke to those standing before him, “Take the filthy garments away from him!” And to Joshua he said, “Behold, I have made your iniquity to pass from you, and I am clothing you with stately robes.”

A careful analysis of these verses reveals much about Satan’s status in heaven before the Son was revealed.

Verse 1: Satan’s Office

Here, Satan is functioning as Prosecutor, or Accuser, in God’s court for crimes committed on earth. Satan, being “the god of this world”, had authority from God to prosecute transgressors of earthly laws. In Revelation, John described Satan as having carried out this responsibility with diligence, prosecuting cases day and night in God’s presence (Rev. 12:10b). Here in Zechariah’s vision, Satan is performing his task in the expected manner, standing at the right hand of the accused, bringing charges against him.

The title “Accuser” may strike some as a title appropriate only to the wicked, but that opinion has no biblical basis. Jesus told the Jews that in the Final Judgment, Moses would be their Accuser (Jn. 5:45), and when he said that, no one took him to mean that Moses was wicked. On the contrary, everyone understood Jesus to be emphasizing Moses’ great authority in God’s kingdom. Just so, serving as heaven’s Accuser only indicated to those in heaven that Satan had great authority, not that he was evil. Of course, an Accuser *can* be evil, but Moses being Israel’s Accuser proves that the title, in itself, does not speak to an Accuser’s character.

Before the Son of God was revealed, no one except God had grounds on which they might accuse Satan of being evil, and God was keeping His reasons hidden with His Son. Satan was the Accuser of evildoers, not the accused, even watching the Israelites to make certain they obeyed the law of Moses. But God “committed all judgment” to the Son (Jn. 5:22), and when the resurrected Son ascended into heaven, he became Satan’s Accuser, and Satan was exposed, condemned, and forever cast out of God’s presence, along with the angels who were like him. The beloved disciple John was given a vision of that epochal event, and when it happened, he heard a loud voice in heaven cry out, “The Accuser of our brothers has been cast out!” (Rev. 12:10a). It was only because of Jesus that Satan lost his exalted office in heaven’s court, and when he lost it, he was livid (cf. Rev. 12:12b). To this day, he has hated Israel because Jesus came from that nation, and hated with a passion those who receive the Spirit that God sends as proof that Jesus is Lord (Rev. 12:13, 17).

Verse 2: The Verdict

In Zechariah’s vision, the presiding angel’s rebuke of Satan was stern, but it would not have revealed to anyone that Satan was wicked. To the heavenly court, the angel’s rebuke only meant that God had ruled against Satan in his case against Joshua. Hundreds of years before this trial took place, Michael had used the same phrase to deny Satan his desire (Jude 1:9), but that rebuke did not expose Satan and cost him his place in heaven; he still occupied, after all that time, his prestigious office. Besides, with which of God’s servants has God not been stern, even severe, including Job, whom God loved? Jesus had no qualms about calling his disciples “fools” (Lk. 24:25), and his frustration with their unbelief once grew to the point that he cried out against them, “O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I continue with you and put up with you!” (Lk. 9:41). Jesus reproved Peter with withering harshness (Mt. 16:23) and hotly rebuked James and John (Lk. 9:52–56) – and they were the three disciples closest to him! Eliphaz, one of Job’s friends, observed that in God’s sight, even angels are foolish (Job 4:18) – and Eliphaz knew nothing about fallen angels; he was talking about all of them.

So, the presiding angel’s blunt rebuke of Satan did not reveal the knowledge hidden in the Son, that God saw Satan as wicked. Moreover, it was known in Israel, even before Zechariah’s time, that God corrects whom He loves (Prov. 3:12) and that “open rebuke is better than secret love” (Prov. 27:5). Therefore, an open, harsh rebuke from God could have been taken as evidence that God loved Satan.

Verses 3–4: Merciful Judgment

Nowhere in the Old Testament is Satan found making a false accusation against anyone.¹ To do so would have been an obvious evil, and Satan’s kind of righteousness precludes him from that. Indeed, Satan would have prosecuted anyone in Israel who made a false accusation, for the law of Moses forbade it (Ex. 20:16). Satan misjudged the strength of Job’s character, to be sure, but misjudging someone is different from bringing phony charges against him. That, Satan did not do.

Satan certainly did not bring charges against Joshua the high priest for doing good deeds. Not in *God’s* court. That would have made no sense at all. Nor did he accuse Joshua for transgressing the laws of heathen countries. God did not require Joshua to live by foreign laws;

¹ Satan’s suggestion to Eve that God had self-serving motives was false. However, he may have believed he was telling the truth. Would Satan have seen any wrong in suggesting that God was self-serving, if that is how he himself was and he thought that he and God were alike?

as an Israelite, Joshua could only be judged by the law God gave to Israel. So, the charges that Satan brought against Joshua were for a real transgression, or transgressions, of Moses' law. The fact that Joshua truly was guilty is indicated by the "filthy garments" Joshua was wearing in the vision. Throughout Scripture, dirty clothing symbolizes sin (Rev. 3:4; Jas. 5:2), just as clean clothing symbolizes righteousness (Isa. 61:10; Rev. 19:8), and when the presiding angel commanded the other angels to take away Joshua's filthy garments, he declared that by doing so, he had taken away Joshua's iniquity.

So, in Zechariah's vision, Satan was not a transgressor; he was prosecuting one. He was much too wise to risk his reputation by accusing someone in heaven's court without an airtight case of provable, damning facts, and if God had not overridden the penalty prescribed in Moses' law, Satan would not have lost the case. The presiding angel's judgment was not supported by the law of Moses; however, Satan and everyone else present knew, even if they did not understand it, that the judgment came from God and that God's judgment is final.

It was fortunate for Joshua (not to mention for the rest of us) that God is above any law, including the law He gave to Israel, and that God will forgive even when the law condemns. God loves mercy; it is always His first choice to forgive. He was grieved when some of His chosen people chose to die in sin rather than repent and live: "I swear on my life, says the Lord GOD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

In acquitting Joshua, God took into account the fact that Joshua and his fellow Jews had recently returned from captivity in Babylon and that they were few in number, poor, and struggling against powerful heathen opposition. Further, and most importantly, God knew their hearts, that they were willing to observe every ordinance of the law exactly as it was written, but time was needed for them to prepare. When Zechariah saw this vision, the Jews did not yet even have a temple where they could perform the required rites. The presiding angel's comment to Satan, "Is not this man a brand plucked out of the fire?" reflects the fact that God understood how difficult Joshua's situation was. God could have agreed with Satan and condemned Joshua, but He is not quick to do that. He is patient. As Peter learned after he was forgiven of his sins, including the sin of swearing with an oath that he did not even know Jesus (Mt. 26:72), God "waits patiently for us, not wanting any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" (2Pet. 3:9).

Unlawful Mercy

A similar instance of God's preference for mercy over judgment took place during the reign of Hezekiah, when the young king invited the Israelites who lived in northern Canaan to come to Jerusalem to keep the law of the Passover. Many of them scoffed at Hezekiah's messengers, but a few humbled themselves and took advantage of the king's invitation (2Chron. 30:6–11). The northern tribes having been without God's law for centuries by that time, the few Israelites who came showed up ritually unprepared. No doubt, Satan would have zealously prosecuted them in heaven's court, but down on earth, good King Hezekiah was pleading with God to show them mercy (2Chron. 30:18–19). In response, God not only forgave their failure to keep His law as written, but blessed them with healings because they had humbled themselves to come to Jerusalem to try to honor Him (2Chron. 30:20–21).

Satan would have judged them by appearances, that is, by how badly they failed to follow the rules governing the Passover, but God judged their hearts. The impoverished Israelites who responded to Hezekiah's call and made the rigorous journey to Jerusalem were make an effort, though ignorantly, to do the right thing. Their ceremonial conduct was undeniably improper, and Satan's case against them, if

there was one, was as airtight as was his case against Joshua the high priest. Nobody could have successfully argued against the case that Satan could have brought into God's court, and he might actually have done so. But God is patient, quick to forgive (Ps. 86:5, 15), and loves to show mercy (cf. Isa. 55:7). Through His prophets, He often pleaded with backslidden Israel to let Him forgive them:

Isaiah 1

15. Your hands are full of blood!

16. Wash yourselves! Make yourselves clean! Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes! Stop doing evil!

.....

18. Come, I pray you, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.

Satan never had such feelings for people, and he never understood them. A merciless law-and-order Prosecutor, Satan could not take into account God's compassion for Joshua, David, and others like them who were willing to do what was commanded, but found themselves in situations that prevented them from doing so. Satan, unlike God, took pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. Ezek. 33:11), just as humans do who have hearts like his (e.g., Jn. 8:1–11). Yet, while anyone could see that Satan's attitude (and that of others) toward sinners was different from God's, nobody at that time knew that in God's sight, such lack of mercy was evil. Nobody but the Son knew that to be unlike God is to be ungodly.

Satan thought he would be "like the Most High" if his throne were exalted to be next to God's throne on the mountain where the sons of God met (Isa. 14:14). He did not understand that being like God is a matter of the heart, not a matter of geography; he was utterly blind to the fact that there was no similarity between his heart and God's. That truth was revealed only when the meek and merciful Son of God came and revealed what being "like the Most High" really means.

There are other examples of God's forbearance with deeds which were strictly forbidden by Moses' law. In one case, after God healed the Syrian general Naaman, God gave Naaman permission to bow in the temple of Rimmon, a heathen god, when he returned to his duties in Syria (2Kgs. 5:1–19). Another time, when young David was fleeing for his life from the increasingly mad King Saul, God helped the hungry fugitive by allowing him to eat holy bread (1Sam. 21:1–6), which under the law, God's priests alone could eat (Lev. 24:5–9). God knew the hearts of those two men, Naaman and David, and He graciously suspended the rules for them when they were in situations beyond their control.

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and the Hidden Son

The Son Asked for Satan

Psalm 109 contains the Son's terrifying, prophetic prayer for vengeance against Judas and his persecutors. When this psalm was first sung, the Son was still hidden, and so, no one could have known it was the voice of the Son prophesying of feelings he would one day have on earth. We know it was the Son crying out through David for vengeance because Peter quoted from this psalm and then said, "This scripture must be fulfilled, which the holy Spirit foretold through the mouth of David concerning Judas" (cf. Acts 1:16–20).

Verse 6 of Psalm 109 is remarkable because it reveals that the hidden Son knew what Satan's office was. To ancient readers, however, it was just the plea of a godly, abused man for justice from God's heavenly Prosecutor:

Psalm 109

2. The mouth of a wicked man and a mouth of deceit are opened against me; they speak of me with a tongue of falsehood.
3. They also surround me with words of hatred, and they make war against me without cause.
4. In return for my love, they become my adversaries. But I give myself to prayer.
5. They have repaid me evil for good, and hatred for my love.
6. Set a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand!

Zechariah was given his vision of Satan standing at the high priest's right hand several centuries *after* David wrote Psalm 109, and Job's story took place centuries *before* Psalm 109 was written. So, the picture of Satan presented to us throughout the Old Testament is consistent; he was a mighty instrument of God, anointed with authority to enforce righteousness and to avenge unrighteousness. Even if someone in those times had dared to think that there might be some "tares" in heaven, he would never have guessed that Satan was one of them.

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and David

Numbering Israel

Man does not need Satan's influence either to be or to do evil. If God were to destroy Satan today, humans would still be sinful and in need of a Savior. At first blush, this seems to be contradicted by the story of Satan moving David to number Israel:

1Chronicles 21

1. Satan² stood up against Israel, and he provoked David to number Israel.
2. And the king said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, "Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and come back to me that I may know the number."

.....

- 7a. But this thing was displeasing in the sight of God.

David's numbering of Israel was indeed a great transgression which provoked God's wrath.³ However, 1Chronicles 21:1 does not tell the whole story. The same event is related in 2Samuel 24:1, and it adds a critically important detail:

2Samuel 24

1. The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He provoked David against them, to say, "Go now, and number Israel and Judah."

The above verse, taken together with 1Chronicles 21:1 shows that Satan was working *with* God, not against Him, just as in the story of Job,. The two accounts even use the same Hebrew verb in describing what both God and Satan did, to wit, they "provoked" David to sin.⁴ Therefore, what God did to David in 2Samuel 24 is exactly what Satan did to David in 1Chronicles 21. No one would have concluded that

² This, in the thirteenth book of the Bible, is the first time Satan is mentioned by name. The relatively few biblical references to him reflect the fact that he is not a figure of great importance, as he has supposed, but a bit player in salvation history.

³ The law required an offering from each person numbered (Ex. 30:11–16). So, David may have been numbering Israel for the money. Whatever his motive, David later confessed that he had committed a great sin (2Sam. 24:10).

⁴ Hebrew: תָּוָע, meaning to incite, allure, or instigate.

what Satan did in 1Chronicles revealed him to be evil, when in 2Samuel, God did the same thing. If both did the same deed at the same time to the same person, who would have deemed Satan to be evil for doing it, but not God?

Unlike the story of Job, we are not told of a conversation God had with Satan before He sent him to David. Nor are we given the specifics concerning how Satan accomplished God's will in David's case. But as in Job, what Satan did is irrelevant, for God determined everything: the sin, the punishment, and the mercy. Also, to rightly understand this story, we must acknowledge that what David did was David's sin, not Satan's or God's. David was not a robot; he had a choice, and he chose to number Israel.

A Merciful Heart Like God's

One can only imagine how much Satan wanted to prosecute David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her righteous husband Uriah, a foreigner who had become one of God's most devoted and capable soldiers (2Sam. 11; 1Chron. 11:10–11, 41). If Satan ever had an open-and-shut case against anyone, that was it. David committed adultery with and impregnated Bathsheba, and then, to cover up the crime, he had Uriah murdered. Moses' law strictly forbade mercy to be shown to either a murderer or an adulterer (Ex. 21:14; Lev. 20:10), and everyone who knew Moses' law knew it, including Satan.

After David committed those two great sins, God sent the prophet Nathan to David's court to publicly confront the king. The disgraced, distraught king knew his situation was hopeless, for the law he loved provided for no sacrifice that would atone for his sins. To add to David's consternation, he remembered what God had done to Israel's previous king after he had sinned. Now, he found himself in an even worse position, and he cried out in his hopelessness, "I have sinned against the LORD!" But then, Nathan pronounced an impossible judgment: "The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2Sam. 12:13). It was unlawful mercy, and most of Israel did not believe God really had sent Nathan to decree such mercy for the king. How could David be allowed to escape death, they reasoned, since God clearly commanded it in the law?

Nathan's declaration of God's unlawful mercy on David ranks with Job's experience as one of the greatest demonstrations of grace shown to man before the Son was revealed. Such unlawful mercy must have surprised and confused the inhabitants of heaven as much as it did the Israelites on earth. We are not told what heaven's reaction was, but so many in Israel doubted that God sent Nathan to David that almost the whole nation revolted against him (2Sam. 20:1–2), the rebellion being led by one of David's own sons (2Sam. 15:1–12). David and his kingdom survived the challenge, but he was forever changed by the touch of New Testament mercy that he received.

One of the reasons David received the incredible mercy he received from God must have been that he was so willing to show mercy to others. When God first chose young David to replace King Saul, God told Samuel that He had found a man with a heart like His (1Sam. 13:14). Afterward, David's willingness to forgive the way God forgives was demonstrated on several occasions when, according to the law, David had justifiable reasons to kill, but chose to show mercy instead. He spared Shimei; he spared mad King Saul twice; merciless Joab three times; his ungodly sons, Amnon and Absalom; and probably others. Early on, David understood that God shows mercy to merciful people (Ps. 18:25), and he was keenly aware of his own need of mercy from God.

God Chose To Honor Satan

It was not unusual for Satan to be entrusted with important missions, those which dealt with God's most valued earthly servants, such as Job, David, and Israel's high priest. If anything, that would have augmented Satan's status among God's sons. In each case, God could have chosen others to carry out the mission, and they would have done it, but He chose to honor Satan with those tasks. And Satan was happy about it, becoming prouder of himself each time he was chosen.

Before God sent His Son to earth, He created an atmosphere in heaven in which all His sons, good and evil alike, felt at liberty to think, say, and do as they would. They even felt that freedom, with God's permission of course, when it involved God's chosen people Israel, as the Reader will shortly see. And all the while, God sat on His throne patiently observing them all — and remembering everything.

“You Thought”

Satan, being full of pride and assuming too much, misjudged everything badly, but his worst error was in assuming that God was like him. Psalm 50 mentions a similar wrong assumption made by an unnamed, sinful man. After listing the sinner's evil deeds, God exposed what he had been thinking: “These things you have done, and I remained silent. You thought that I was altogether *such a one* as yourself” (Ps. 50:21). The only way Satan could have hoped, as he did, to be elevated to reign with God was for him to think that God was “altogether such a one” as himself. Actually, though, Satan *was* more like God, *as he thought God was*, than any other creature; he just didn't know God.

What Satan did know is that God knew everything, including what was in his heart. And as time passed and God did not rebuke him for thinking he was so much like God that he would be exalted to sit at His right hand, Satan grew increasingly confident of that expectation. It is impossible to believe that Satan thought his desire for the highest of honors was hidden from his Maker. After all, he would have reasoned, had not God chosen him over all others to prove the faith of Job, the most perfect man on earth? And had not God chosen him to provoke King David to number Israel, the man after God's own heart? And was he not the one appointed to stand up for God's law when Joshua the high priest failed to keep the law? And in Psalm 109, was he not the one called for, when an Accuser against a wicked man was needed? And there must have been many other times when God used Satan to carry out His designs and many court cases in heaven that Satan did not lose, all of which would have made Satan think more highly of himself.

Of course, Satan's dream of sharing in God's glory was the ultimate self-delusion. He was nothing like God, in his heart. God did seem to have a close relationship with Satan, but that was only because God was not letting anyone know what He really thought about anything. He had ordained a specific time for His Son to be revealed, and with him, the truth.

God's patience is terrifying.

TARES IN HEAVEN: The Lying Spirit

Joyfully Returning to Heaven

In the book of Job, as we saw, Satan was introduced as one of the sons of God, perfectly relaxed as he conversed with God. The following story shows that Satan was not the only evil spirit that felt at home in heaven.

During the reign of wicked King Ahab, God gave the prophet Micaiah a vision of a gathering of the sons of God in which God patiently consulted with them concerning how to kill Ahab. Then, one of them volunteered to go to earth and speak to Ahab through his prophets and deceive him:

1Kings 22

19. Micaiah said, “I saw the LORD sitting on His throne and all the host of heaven standing about Him, to His right and to His left.
20. And the LORD said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up and die at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one answered this way, and another answered that way.
21. Then a spirit there came forth and stood before the LORD, and he said, ‘I will persuade him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘How?’
22. And he said, ‘I will go forth, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And He said, ‘You will persuade him. Yea, you will succeed. Go and do so!’”

A superficial reading of this scene might lead one to think that God was asking for advice, but in spite of how He made it seem, God does everything “according to the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11). What God was doing in this meeting was creating another situation that would bring out what was in the hearts of the spirits around Him. As previously mentioned, God cunningly made those around Him feel free to express what they truly felt.

It is important that we see this scene rightly, for what it tells us is that the angels that sinned were not coerced to do so; they freely chose the wrong path. Far from forcing them to do evil, God liberated them with His patience and humility to be who they really wanted to be. Faithful angels were not forced to make their choice, either; they, too, were liberated to be who they really wanted to be.

In the heavenly meeting that Micaiah saw, each spirit’s suggestion about what to do, whether good or bad, exposed what was in his heart, for “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Mt. 12:34). What each one said became a matter of record so that when the Son finally made known the mind of God, all of heaven’s creatures would understand why some were cast out and others were allowed to stay.

The crafty spirit that volunteered to be a lying spirit to Ahab’s prophets had no idea how contemptible he was in God’s sight. No doubt, he congratulated himself all the way from heaven to earth because God had chosen him over all others to accomplish that important mission. And after he succeeded in deceiving Ahab by lying to him through his prophets (a case of what we now understand to be demon possession), there was nothing to prevent that spirit from joyfully returning to heaven to bask in the glory of his success. How could he possibly have known that God saw him as evil? God did not tell him. The Son remained hidden. He no doubt assumed, as Satan did, that God was like him.

“I, the LORD, Deceived That Prophet”

Confirmation that this sort of thing took place in heaven before the Son was revealed is found in Ezekiel 14:1–11. There, when some hypocritical elders came to Ezekiel, making a show of wanting to hear the word of the LORD, God was indignant. He told Ezekiel that when the disobedient came to hear from Him, He would not answer, but would send a lying spirit to deceive their prophets and then destroy both them, their prophets for lying and them for believing the prophets’ lies:

Ezekiel 14

9. As for the prophet, when he is deceived and gives a message, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him, and I will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.
10. And so, they will bear their punishment. The punishment of the one who inquires will be the same as the punishment of the prophet.

TARES IN HEAVEN: The Angel and Balaam

“On Satan’s Behalf”

The Hebrew word, “Satan”, may be translated “adversary”, as is often found in translations of the story of Balaam. Had we chosen “adversary” instead of “Satan” in Psalm 109, above, it would have suggested that the Son was only asking his Father to send *a* prosecutor, not that he was asking for Satan by name. That seemed unlikely, and so, after much consideration, we opted for the translation we have. Likewise, in translating Balaam’s story, below, we opted for “Satan” as a better choice than “adversary”.

The prophet Balaam was one of the great men of his time. He was a genuine prophet of God, though not an Israelite, and his fame spread far beyond the borders of his Mesopotamian homeland. However, Balaam succumbed to the lure of the riches and high honor offered to him by Moab’s king, Balak, and when Balaam left Mesopotamia to go to Moab, “God’s anger was kindled because he went” (Num. 22:22a).

God’s anger against Balaam came in the form of an angel who was sent to kill him (Num. 22:33). We are told that the angel “positioned himself in the road against him, for Satan” (Num. 22:22b). And later the angel made this remarkable statement: “Behold! I have come forth for Satan because your way is perverse before me” (Num. 22:32b). That an angel would come “for Satan”, that is, on Satan’s behalf, makes perfect biblical sense. Since Satan was god of this world and ruled over certain angels, he had authority to send them forth to carry out the decrees of God that were issued to him. In this case, God had given the command to slay Balaam for exploiting his gift from God for the sake of earthly gain.

I should point out that there is another, though less likely, possible translation of the word “Satan” in Numbers 22:32b. If the angel who met Balaam had a boastful spirit, the Hebrew preposition in this verse allows for him to have said, “I have come forth like Satan.” It was tempting to translate the verse as of the angel was proudly comparing himself to the great one, Satan, but in the end, we decided not to go that way. Whether *for* Satan or *like* Satan, however, the angel was clearly functioning *as* Satan functioned, that is, as a stern adversary to those who erred from the right path.⁵

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and the Sons of Zeruiah

“Acting Like Satan”

As in the previous story, most translations use “adversary” instead of “Satan”. However, when Satan’s office as Prosecutor is understood, the word “Satan” seems to fit much better than “adversary” in David’s rebuke of his nephew, Abishai.

The three sons of David’s sister, Zeruiah, were highly regarded officers in David’s army who saw themselves as David’s greatest defenders, exercising merciless hatred toward David’s enemies. When David was fleeing Jerusalem just ahead of his son Absalom’s attacking army, a wicked man named Shimei watched from the top of a hill as the weeping king walked through the valley. Shimei angrily mocked, cursed, and pelted the barefoot and weeping king, and those with him, with stones as he passed below (2Sam. 16:5–13). Abishai, one of Zeruiah’s sons, was indignant at this insult to the king and asked permission to go “take that dead dog’s head off,” but David refused to allow him to do it, and humbly walked on.

⁵ Satan would not have seen any wrong in Balaam using his prophetic gift to gain money and prestige. And since God would not have confided in Satan as to His reason for wanting Balaam dead, Satan may have assumed that God wanted Balaam dead for entering Balak’s employ, using God’s gift to him in Balak’s service, who wanted to harm the people God had chosen for Himself.

Later, after David's army defeated Absalom's army and David returned to Jerusalem, the fearful Shimei came meekly to the king and knelt before him, begging for mercy,

2Samuel 19

21. but Abishai the son of Zeruah answered and said, "Should not Shimei be put to death for this? He abused the LORD's anointed!"

22a. Then David said, "What is there between you sons of Zeruah and me, that you should act like Satan on my behalf today?"

No doubt, Abishai was disappointed that David again refused him permission to kill Shimei; at the same time, he very likely felt flattered by being compared with Satan. It was not every day that a man was compared with that mighty servant of God. But the comparison was just.

Joab, the highest ranking of Zeruah's three sons, consistently demonstrated Satan's merciless zeal against transgressors, even after those transgressors repented. He killed both Abner and Amasa after those two generals ceased fighting against David and offered to join forces with him (2Sam. 3:12–39; 20:9–10). But Joab's unwillingness to forgive transgressions was not only like Satan; it also matched God's description to Moses of His angel:

Exodus 23

22. Behold, I am sending an angel before you to protect you along the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

21. Beware of him, and obey his voice. Do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.

If God's angel did not forgive transgressions, then who in David's time would have seen Joab as evil for not forgiving transgressors, even after those transgressors had stopped transgressing? The answer is no one. What they all would have seen is that although David did condemn some of Joab's actions, he allowed him to continue serving him as general of his army and did not punish Joab for his satanic zeal against those who transgressed against David.

David had a heart like God's. He was patient. And in the end, he commanded his son Solomon to execute righteous judgment against Joab and kill him (1Kgs. 2:5–6), just as God would later command His Son to execute righteous judgment against Satan and cast him out of heaven.

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and the Avenging Angels

More Destructive than Satan

Satan was not the only heavenly being God sent forth to execute His righteous judgments. In addition to the angel who opposed Balaam and the angel God sent with Moses, we see in the prophecy found in Psalm 35 that the Son prayed for the Father to send an avenging angel against the men who schemed to have him killed:

Psalm 35

4. Let them be disappointed, and let them be confounded who seek my life! Let them be turned back and put to shame who devise my harm!

5. Let them be as chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away!

6. Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD harassing them!

Notice the vengeful nature of the acts that the Son prayed for God's angel to carry out. If we compare what this angel was called upon to do with what Satan was called upon to do in Psalm 109, the angel actually comes across as more destructive than Satan. In Psalm 109, the Son asked only that God send Satan to prosecute a transgressor, but here, he asks that God send His angel to execute vengeful punishment.

The similarities between the angel of Psalm 109 and Satan are striking. Both were used by God in matters concerning His people, both had great power, and both were merciless. Most of us would consider the merciless angel of Psalm 109 to be holy; at the same time, we consider Satan to be wicked, although nothing indicates wickedness in either of those heavenly beings. Again, the only reason we think of Satan as evil is that "the Son of God has come and has given us understanding" (1Jn. 5:20). There is no other way we could have known it.

The awe which God's avenging angels inspired among ancient people, and perhaps even among some heavenly beings, may have surpassed the awe which Satan inspired. As far as the biblical record is concerned, those angels afflicted far more people, far more often, and far more cruelly than Satan ever did. The cruelest of Satan's activities recorded in the Old Testament are those we have already discussed. They are:

- He obeyed God's command to afflict Job.
- He and God moved David to number Israel.
- He strictly enforced the law, even prosecuting Israel's high priest when he failed to keep it.
- He sent an angel to kill Balaam when God wanted him dead.

Which of those activities could be considered evil? Moreover, Satan never inflicted the massive damage and destruction the Bible attributes to God's angels, such as these:

- Destroying four populated cities with fire from heaven (Gen. 19:1–25).
- Striking Egypt with horrific plagues (Ps. 78:49).
- Killing seventy thousand Israelites with a plague (2Sam. 24:15).
- In one night, slaughtering 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2Kgs. 19:35).

The Bible commends all those deeds as righteous judgments of God. How, then, could the acts of Satan be looked at differently? Before the Son exposed Satan as the liar and murderer he is (Jn. 8:44), no one associated Satan with either lies or murder because the biblical record never showed Satan to be guilty of such sins. If wickedness is to be determined on the basis of the degree of pain and death inflicted, then when we compare what humans and angels did in the Old Testament to what Satan did, we must conclude that humans and angels are more wicked than Satan!

Other Agents, or None

God did not limit Himself to the use of Satan and angels to bring about His righteous judgments. He used nature (Ezek. 13:10–14), animals (2Kgs. 2:23–24; Joel 2:25), and both righteous and unrighteous men (Samuel in 1Sam. 15:32–33 and Baasha in 1Kgs. 15:25–27). He also used nations to destroy other nations, as when He sent Israel to brutally conquer the wicked Canaanites (Dt. 9:4–5; Josh. 10:40), then sent Assyria to destroy Israel after they had become wicked, and then sent Babylon to conquer Judah for the same reason.

In many instances, the Bible states that God Himself brought about terrible suffering and death, without any mention of agents, whether heavenly or earthly. In the first book of the Bible, God is said to

have destroyed the earth with the Flood, all but wiping out the human race (Gen. 7:21–22). In Numbers, God is said to have created a new way to kill men by opening up the earth beneath the tents of Dathan and Abiram and carrying those wicked men and their families alive down into the abyss (Num. 16:28–33). Hundreds of verses in the books of the prophets tell us that God sent or threatened to send all sorts of miseries on mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. God *may* have used agents in all those events, but even if He did, the fact remains that God is responsible for the sufferings that His agents bring about. So then, if causing greater damage equals greater wickedness, what are we to think about what the Bible tell us what God did (and will do) in comparison to what it tells us about Satan? Who, God or Satan, has inflicted the greater amount of suffering?

Again, my point is not that Satan is good; he most certainly is not. My point is only that until the Son came and paid the price for men to receive God’s kind of life, no one could see that Satan was evil. In hiding the Son, God was hiding the truth about everything and everybody, and most of all, the truth about Himself. And in hiding Himself, God was concealing not only what he thought of Satan and the angels like him, but also what He thought about faithful angels such as Michael and Gabriel; no one knew that God saw some as good and others as evil.

The plain truth of it is no one in heaven or earth rightly understood anything before the Son came and paid the price for others than himself to share in God’s kind of life and enjoy fellowship with Him. How foolish it is for anyone to refuse the Spirit Jesus died for us to have, for those who do not have the Spirit now cannot know God any better than those who lived before it came!

TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and Eve

Improving the Fellowship

Perhaps the most puzzling story in the Bible concerning Satan is that of the serpent and Eve in the garden of Eden. I associate Satan with the serpent because of four reasons:

- Satan is called “the ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9) and “the crooked serpent” (Isa. 27:1).
- Ezekiel says Satan was “in Eden, the garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13).
- Jesus called Satan “the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44).
- Paul was concerned that Satan’s ministers would beguile the saints in Corinth “the way the serpent beguiled Eve in the garden” (2Cor. 11:3, 15).

How Satan and the serpent were connected, we are not told; that is one of the mysteries involved in the story. But there was certainly a connection, and so, though being unable to explain that element of the story, I will speak of the serpent as being Satan himself.

After Satan became proud and was no longer the upright cherub he was created to be (Ezek. 28:14–17), he had a self-serving motive for doing whatever he did, and thinking that God and he were alike, he would have believed he was telling Eve the truth when he suggested to her that God had a self-serving motive for keeping her and Adam from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What is certain is that Satan was not trying to “go behind God’s back” to accomplish some clandestine, wicked deed, for he knew well that it is impossible to do anything without God knowing it. Nowhere in the Bible do we find Satan trying to sneak around God with what he does, not even in the New Testament. Evil men may think that God does not see them, but Satan, never.

The typical Christian view of Satan in the garden is that he was scheming to do evil, trying to undermine God’s fellowship with Adam and Eve. But what if Satan was actually thinking to improve that fellowship, to usher them into the kind of fellowship he thought he had with God? Or what if God

sent Satan to Eden to speak to Eve, as He later sent him to Job, which is actually the more likely scenario.

It is remarkable that there was so much truth in what Satan told Eve:

Genesis 3

[Satan to Eve]

5a. “God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened,”

[What happened]

6. And the woman . . . took some of its fruit and ate it. Then she also gave it to her husband with her, and he ate it.

7a. And the eyes of them both were opened.

Genesis 3

[Satan to Eve]

5b. “and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

[What happened]

22. And the LORD God said [to the hidden Son], “Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil.”

God’s warning to Adam was that *on the day* he ate the forbidden fruit, he would die (Gen. 3:4), but Satan assured Eve they would not die (on that day). That seems contrary to what God said, but in a way, even that proved to be true, for after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they did not die *on that day*, as God had said. They lived a long time and had many children after that:

Genesis 2

[God to Adam]

17. “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.”

[What happened after they ate the fruit]

Genesis 4

1a. And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.

2a. And again, she gave birth to his brother, Abel.

. . . .

25. And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son, and she called his name Seth.

Genesis 5

4. And the days of Adam after he fathered Seth were eight hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters.

5. And all of the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

On the day Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they did die to purity, innocence, and closeness to God, and the process of their dying physically also began. But Satan probably did not understand that kind of death because he himself was already dead that way, and didn’t realize it.

Christianity’s Satan

The traditional picture of Satan in the garden of Eden as a conniving miscreant changes substantially when all things are considered. The mythological Satan of Medieval Christianity is a hideous creature with a long tail, horns, and a pitchfork, but that view of him is completely foreign to the Scriptures and

has badly distorted people's perception of Satan, and so, their perception of good and evil, right and wrong, etc. Those who do not see Satan as he really is do not see God as He really is, either. It must have been an astonishing revelation to the disciples when Jesus declared that God's fearsome and obedient servant Satan was evil, but Jesus came to reveal who God really is, and that truth was part of it.

Christianity's Satan is altogether a human invention. The real Satan was created wise and beautiful, with great power and authority, and he willingly worshipped God along with all the sons of God in heaven. "You were perfect in your ways", Ezekiel said, "from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you" (Ezek. 28:15). But that unrighteousness, pride in his spectacular beauty (Ezek. 28:17), must have been found soon after he was created, for Jesus said he did not continue in the truth, but became "a murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). But that assessment of Satan's character was hidden until the Son was revealed. Before then, God did not rebuke Satan for his thoughts, and Satan assumed that God approved of them. Satan was excited about his future. God was patient.

TARES ON EARTH: JUDAS

A Man My Own Equal

Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:71); nevertheless, the other disciples never saw Jesus treat Judas any different from the way he treated them. They never suspected that Jesus was demonstrating, the whole time, the Father's terrifying patience with wickedness. Judas was taught as they were, anointed as they were, and sent out as they were with power to work miracles (Mt. 10:1–4). And as they no doubt did, Judas did some good deeds during the years he traveled with Jesus. If anything, the disciples held Judas in special regard because Jesus seemed to. After all, Jesus had chosen Judas over Matthew, a professional money-handler, to carry the moneybag and to distribute the funds that were in it (Jn. 12:4–6). So, it must have appeared to the other disciples that Judas held a special place in Jesus' heart, and judging by what the hidden Son of God prophesied through David about Judas, such was indeed the case:

Psalm 55

12. It was not an enemy who reproached me; then, I could have borne it. Nor was it one who hated me who puffed himself up against me; then, I would have hidden myself from him.
13. But it was you, a man my own equal, my intimate friend, and my companion,
14. for we took sweet counsel together, and walked among the throng in the house of God.

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares was intended by Jesus to alert his disciples to God's fearful patience with evil, a patience that God had quietly exhibited in heaven for thousands of years. Now, in his dealing with Judas, the Son provided his disciples with a similar example on earth.

Diabolos

The New Testament Greek word translated "devil" is *diabolos*. A frustrated Jesus once used that word to refer to the betrayer:

John 6

66. At this, many of his disciples went back to former things, and walked with him no longer.
67. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Don't you want to leave, too?"

68. Then Simon Peter answered him, “Master, who will we go to? You have words of eternal life.
69. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”
70. Jesus answered them, “Didn’t I choose you twelve, and one of you is a *diabolos*?”⁶

At the Last Supper, just moments after Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him, Jesus looked at Judas and said, “What you do, do quickly” (Jn. 13:21–26, 27b).⁷ Knowing what we on this side of Pentecost know, we see Jesus’ statement to Judas as an obvious giveaway that he was the betrayer. At that time, however, the other disciples did not see it, for they considered Judas to be above suspicion. Instead, they all assumed that Jesus had sent his close friend Judas on an errand (Jn. 13:28–29), just as the angels in heaven had often watched God send His trusted servant Satan on errands.

The Son was always the perfect reflection of the Father’s being (Heb. 1:3), and in no way did the Son more perfectly reflect the Father than in his handling of his Satan-like disciple, Judas. The Son’s patience is also terrifying.

TARES ON EARTH: Satan and the Pharisees

Sons of the Accuser

It is dangerous to presume to act on God’s behalf without having a heart like God’s. Jesus warned his disciples that they would suffer at the hands of such men, men who believed themselves to be acting on God’s behalf, but who were not like God in their hearts:

John 16

2. They will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he’s offering a service to God.
3. And they will do these things because they haven’t known either the Father or me.

Such men are the Satans of this world, so to speak, religious leaders who are devoted to God *as they think God is*. During the two millennia of this New Testament era, men of this sort have plundered, brutalized, and killed many an innocent saint, thinking they were offering a service to God. The plaintiff cry of murdered saints rises continually in heaven, saying, “How long, O Master, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on earth?” (Rev. 6:10), but for now, they are being told to “wait for a while” (Rev. 6:11). In other words, they are being told to be patient, like God.

The tares on earth have always worshipped among God’s wheat, and when tares occupy positions of authority over God’s people, they often reflect the merciless spirit of Satan, as in the scene below:

John 8

2. Early in the morning, Jesus went again to the temple, and all the people began to come, and he sat down and taught them.
3. Then the scribes and Pharisees led a woman to him who had been caught in adultery, and when they had stood her in the midst,
4. they said to him, testing him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery!

⁶ In this verse, we translated *diabolos* as “slanderer”, but it could also be “accuser”, which was Satan’s function in heaven prior to being cast out.

⁷ Jesus was no longer talking merely to Judas, for Satan had just taken possession of his body (Jn. 13:27a).

5. In the law, Moses commanded us that such women are to be stone. Now then, what do you say?"

These scribes and Pharisees were acting exactly as Satan did in Zechariah's vision. They were doing on earth what Satan did in heaven's court, working *with* God, not against Him, and in their enforcement of righteousness, they used the same thing that Satan used, the holy law of Moses. Their office, and his, required them to enforce the righteousness of Moses' law, and when they caught a woman "in the very act of adultery", they hoped to "kill two birds with one stone" – the unfortunate woman and Jesus. They stood, as it were, at the woman's right hand, accusing her, demanding a judgment from Jesus. She was undeniably guilty of transgressing God's law, and their case against the poor woman was as airtight as were Satan's cases against Joshua and David. It is little wonder that Jesus called such men sons of the Accuser (Jn. 8:44).

At the end of the story, Jesus' compassion for the woman found a way to put her Accusers to shame, and they turned and went away, leaving her alone with the Lord (Jn. 8:9).⁸ But who at the time would have seen them as evil for upholding the standard required by the holy law of Moses? The people looking on certainly did not. Otherwise, those men could not have continued to enjoy a wide following in Israel. On the contrary, they retained their high standing despite their hearts being like Satan because the Son was still hidden, even though he was here on earth. It was only after he sacrificed himself that anyone could have God's kind of life so that they might know God's thoughts concerning good from evil.

The Tradition of the Elders

Even among his followers, Jesus had to deal with sons of the Accuser. These men revered, along with the law, rules which they called "the tradition of the elders". Earlier sons of the Accuser devised those rules for Israel and adhered to them as if they were as authoritative as the law itself. This was the case when some devout Pharisees, though followers of Jesus at the time, condemned other disciples for plucking and eating some grain as they all passed through a field on a Sabbath. The law of Moses allowed for that (Dt. 23:24), but the tradition of the elders did not. This is how Jesus responded to their accusations:

Matthew 12

3. He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him,
4. how he entered into the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which wasn't lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but only for the priests?
- ...
7. If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless."

Jesus' point was that the law was made for man, but in the view of Satan and his sons, man was made for the law, and they despised anyone who did not keep it precisely. Pride in one's own righteousness blinds the heart to the love of God, and those who are righteous and proud of it always

⁸ Jesus actually agreed with them, that the law required the woman to be stoned; he only added the requirement that no one but sinless men should carry out the execution. That is what stopped them (Jn. 11:7-11).

feel contempt for those whom they deem less righteous than themselves. God referred to such a smug attitude as being “at ease”:

Job 12

5. The one who is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.

God hates such an attitude, and He sent prophets to warn His people against it:

Amos 6

1. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion!

Because they think it pleases God, self-righteous souls are dutiful in maintaining the kind of righteousness that is meant to be seen. Satan did it first, he did it in heaven, and he did it for a very long time in the presence of a very patient God. In God’s time, however, the Son was revealed, and the truth about good and evil came to light. In heaven, God’s faithful servants were relieved of the burden of the presence of evil when the resurrected Son returned to heaven and cleansed it. Likewise, God’s faithful servants on earth will be forever relieved of the presence of evil when His Son’s eternal kingdom is established on the new earth, as Peter said, “We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2Pet. 3:13). And we need not fear the reappearance of evil, for God promised through the prophet that “He will make an utter end. Trouble will not rise up a second time” (Nah. 1:9b)

WHEN GOD IS QUIET

Like tares growing in the midst of heaven’s wheat, creatures whose hearts were evil were allowed to continue in heaven for a very long time before the Son was revealed. God quietly watched them rejoice and worship before Him with creatures whose hearts were upright in His sight. His quiet patience determined everything by providing all His Sons with liberty to be who they really wanted to be. God’s demeanor created the situation in which the heart of every creature in heaven was tried, without them even knowing they were being tried. They felt completely free, and yet, God was always in complete control.

Romans 11

33. Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and inscrutable His ways!
34. Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has been His counsellor?

God’s withholding of correction, His silence when sin is committed, is a most fearful form of divine wrath. David was right when he said that whoever is corrected by God is blessed (Ps. 94:12). And by whatever name God’s correction is called – whether discipline, chastisement, instruction, or anything else – to be shown it is to be loved, and it is a precious gift that the wise pray for. It is impossible to know whom God loves by seeing whom He blesses; it is only by seeing whom God chastens that we may know whom He loves.

Proverbs 3

11. My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction,
12. for whom the LORD loves, He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights.

Revelation 3

19. As many as I hold dear, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent!

It is also true that we cannot know who loves God based upon who worships Him. Everyone in heaven worshipped God, but through the ages, God did nothing to indicate that the worship of some of His heavenly sons was not accepted. They all knew that God hated and was angry with the wicked every day (Pss. 5:5; 7:11), but they did not know that God saw some of them as wicked. God did indeed hate the wicked; He hated them with perfect hatred (Ps. 139:22). But perfect hatred can wait, the way Absalom patiently waited two years before killing his hated brother Amnon (2Sam. 13:22–29). It is perfect love that rebukes and chastens (Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19); perfect hatred is perfectly patient.

Hated Worshipers

To this day, evil spirits, including Satan, worship God. Paul said as much when he said (1) demons devise doctrines about God and His Son that appeal to many of God’s own children (1Tim. 4:1), and (2) “Satan transforms himself into a messenger of light” and “his ministers also transform themselves *to be* like ministers of righteousness” (2Cor. 11:14–). Heaven’s creatures were created to worship, and they cannot alter that work of God (Eccl. 3:14). Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven, but they cannot cease from doing what they were created to do, even if the way they do it is unacceptable to their Creator. It may help the Reader to understand this if it is remembered that Jesus never called harlots and drunkards “sons of the Accuser”. He reserved that ignoble title for those who appear to be good. Satan and his sons embrace religious observance, and they thrive in a morally correct environment. Satan encourages humans to dutifully observe solemn, religious practices and to uphold standards of good conduct. That is what he did in heaven, and he has not changed.

Jesus criticized Satan’s sons for doing the will of their father (Jn. 8:44). But what were they doing? According to Jesus, they fasted twice a week (Lk. 18:12), made long prayers (Mt. 23:14), spent great sums on missionary work (Mt. 23:15), and gave tithes of everything that came into their possession (Mt. 23:23). That is what Satan’s sons did, and they were pillars of the Jewish community; they would not have robbed a bank or committed adultery for any amount of money. Their righteousness was seen and known by all. (They made sure of that.) They strictly observed the law’s rites and rules, as well as the traditions of their elders. However, their maintenance of proper form masked the wickedness of their hearts – just like their father, Satan.

That some men were so much like Satan — outwardly impressive but ungodly within — that they qualified to be called Satan’s offspring was God’s long-hidden judgment of them. They were perfect in their own kind of righteousness, and they could not believe the Son when he brought God’s righteousness to light. Nevertheless, the Son boldly warned them:

Matthew 23

23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You tithe on mint, and dill, and cumin, but you’ve left off the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy, and faith. These things you ought to have done and not left those off!
24. *You* blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow down a camel!
25. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but inside, they are full of greed and injustice.
26. You blind Pharisee! Clean first what is inside the cup and dish so that the outside of them may also be clean.

27. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You’re like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear to be so very lovely, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.
28. Yes, that is how you are! You outwardly appear very righteous to men, but inwardly, you’re full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Luke 16

15. You are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts! That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees were always watching him like a hawk circling his prey, waiting for just a word or deed which they could use against him (e.g., Mt. 19:3; Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; Jn. 8:3–5). But in boldly declaring God’s judgments in spite of the threat, Jesus was following the sage advice he gave to me when I was young in the Lord. He said to me, “When you’re being watched like hawk, don’t act like a chicken!”

Jesus loved the truth that His Father taught him, and that love motivated him to say plainly to those who were watching him, to find fault with him, “You are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts! That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:15). Nothing is more highly esteemed in this world than man’s lofty religious creeds and ceremonies, but without the life of God, the more eloquent and lovely a religion is, the more of an abomination it is because the greater number of souls it will attract and deceive.

By all appearances, the scribes, Pharisees, and priests were good men, doing the will of God, but then, by all appearances, so were Satan and his angels in heaven. We must heed the warnings not to be fooled appearances! Solomon warned his son that there are ways that seem right, but they only lead to death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Yet, in spite of such godly warnings, our fleshly nature would have us to choose the righteousness that *seems* good over the righteousness that *is* good. It is our human nature to deceive ourselves and “love the honor of men more than the honor of God” (Jn. 12:43).

Paul acknowledged that God’s use of the wicked, quietly watching them delude themselves and continue in darkness, seems unfair to some people (Rom. 9:19), but then he answered that God’s being patient with the ungodly is no one’s business but God’s (Rom. 9:20–21). The sum of Paul’s argument was this: “So what, if God, desiring to demonstrate His wrath and to make known His power, bore with great patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction?” (Rom. 9:22). Who is man, Paul would have asked, to grumble about what the Creator does with His creatures?

The inescapable reality is that God is using all of us all the time, the proud and the humble, the rebellious and the obedient. May we all find grace to be used as “vessels of honor” rather than of dishonor (2Tim. 2:20–21), for the vessels of honor will be saved, but the vessels of dishonor, even if after a lifetime of service to God (as they think He is), will be rejected and cast away (cf. 1Cor. 9:27).

When God is quiet, what do we think? If we dare to think that we know what to think when God has revealed nothing, we are foolish. When God has revealed nothing, nothing is known, and the sooner we learn that, the better off we will be.

THE POINT

Because of the Son, we now know that Satan and some of God’s angels were wicked. But *our* knowledge of their wickedness is not the point; the point of this chapter has been to demonstrate the knowledge that God had, specifically His knowledge that “tares” were growing in His heavenly wheat field. Until God revealed His Son, no one else in heaven or earth, except the Son, knew that God was

purposefully allowing them to grow. Indeed, until then, no one anywhere knew what God really thought about anything. So great was the blindness in heaven that the fellowship which God appeared to have with Satan secured a good reputation for him among the sons of God. All God's sons heard Him say that Satan had moved Him to afflict righteous Job without a cause (Job 2:3), and *who*, they would have wondered, *could move the Almighty to do anything but an exceptionally wise and powerful being?*⁹ God knew they were thinking wrongly about Satan, but God was waiting for His Son to reveal that truth, and God is very patient.

On this side of Pentecost, the tares in God's kingdom are His uncorrected children. Often, their ungodliness is not apparent, and they often escape notice. They may have some knowledge and wonderful experiences, as well as gifts and testimonies that win hearts. And they may be very confident, as Satan once was, that God approves of them. In no Old Testament story do we see Satan doing anything contrary to what God wanted done; and yet, God saw him as wicked. Similarly, tares in the body of Christ may prophesy, cast out demons, perform miracles, hear things from Jesus, and feast in the Spirit with fellow believers (Mt. 7:22; Lk. 13:26). Nevertheless, when they feast among the saints, they are eating and drinking damnation upon themselves because they are feasting "unworthily" (1Cor. 11:27–29), and in the end, they will be damned:

Matthew 7

21. Not everyone who says to me, "Lord! Lord!" will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
22. Many will say to me in that day, "Lord! Lord! Haven't we prophesied in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name?"
23. Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Go away from me, you who work lawlessness!"

To this sober warning, Paul added one of the most sobering exhortations found in the New Testament:

1Corinthians 10

- 11a. All these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition.
12. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Thankfully, God has also given us comforting reassurance of His care, "for He has said, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you.' So then, we may boldly say, 'The LORD is my helper, and I will not be afraid of what man will do to me'" (Heb. 13:5b–6). Let us, then, rest in the love of God's Son Jesus, who "is able to save completely and forever those who come to God through him, seeing that he is living always to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24a). "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me," Jesus said, and then he repeated the promised made by his Father: "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Mt. 28:18, 20b)

⁹ The fallen human race is, in one respect, better off with Satan's influence than they would be without it. Satan's desire to reign with God in His kingdom shows that he values order, for God's kingdom has perfect order. Jesus himself stated that Satan's kingdom was orderly (Mt. 12:25–26), and the order imposed on man by the governments and religions of the world (all of them under Satan) benefit mankind by restraining man's unruly nature. Satan cannot purify man's nature as Jesus can, but through earthly authorities, Satan can influence even wicked men to behave better than they would without those authorities.