



Trinity 2

THE NEW SHOFAR

The Devil made me do it!

Genesis 3:8-15 - Mark 3:20-35

Satan and his evil minions do exist

Our modern enlightened Western cultures prefer to dismiss the possibility of the existence of the Devil, Satan, Beelzebub and the like. These names all too readily conjure up images of ghosts, horror movies and beasts that are half human and half animal. The problem though is how the Church, from its earliest days and down through subsequent centuries, has consistently taught the reality of the devil and of evil spirits. They have an impact on human history and on the lives of individual men and women. However, for all of their evil they remain under the sovereign authority of God. They have no power to control us (that is left for Hollywood demons) and do not take away our free will or responsibility for our actions.

Any Christians wanting to deny the existence of the Devil are responsible for putting forward solid arguments for what is a novel teaching. Stacked against them is a clear biblical revelation. The Hebrew scriptures abound with examples of the way evil is personified in such spirits. More importantly is the way our own New Testament continues these traditions, with Jesus noting the activities of *the evil one* (**Matthew**), *the enemy* (**Luke**), *the father of lies* (**John**) a rebel (**Mark**) and more. He is a force opposed to Jesus Christ, an opposition most clearly on show at the crucifixion (Luke, John). But this moment of apparent victory is at the same time the moment of his defeat. Satan is overpowered in the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:8) but opposition will continue until the End (Revelation 20:2-10).

It is not enough to put aside all of this biblical revelation on the basis of it being culturally bound to a time long past. The rejection of Satan and the watering down of ideas of sin, hell and punishment due to sin has done much to diminish the reality of God in creation. While generations past may have overemphasised sin and evil, we do not address the problem by dismissing them altogether.

They made loin cloths from fig leaves and hid from God

Eating of the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden led to the *opening of the eyes* of Adam and Eve and for the very first time they *realized they were naked*. This has nothing to do with being nude. It is about the new reality for men and women. They understand their vulnerability, how there is nothing standing between themselves and the world around them. They have turned away from God and chosen to rule over their own destinies, to shape the world in ways they think are improvement on what God has already done for them. It is obvious just how inadequate are their first attempts to provide the protection they will need – fig leaves. The scariest thing of all is how they now need to protect themselves from each other. The greatest harm threatening them now comes from their fellow human beings. As human history illustrates so sadly, we are our own worst enemies.

Humankind has fallen from *walking with God in the cool of the evening* to seeking to *hide from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden*. This is why God sent his only Son to become a man like us in every way but sin. His mission and ministry was about a restoration, reconciliation.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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Jesus lives and we are forgiven

For the Jews the only sins that could be forgiven were unintentional sins (Leviticus 4-5). Intentional, wilful or defiant sins could not be atoned for and would suffer severe punishment. That is not a very comforting belief given the ease with which even the holiest among us can fall to temptation and sin.

However, the message here from Jesus is all about the way all sin can be forgiven. This is a key moment in the Gospel because it affirms that any assessment God makes of us will be made in the light of Jesus his Son – his life, death and resurrection. Forgiveness comes from God as a free gift and not through any work or act we can do on our own. We are not lost or doomed because we sin and fall by the wayside. We are lost only when we do not turn to God for forgiveness and healing. There is nothing we can do that will close heaven's doors and cut us off from divine life. The wantonness of our sin is not significant, nor is our evil intent, or the depth of depravity found in them. God loves us and wants us forgiven.

Acknowledge our sins, ask for forgiveness and God will set us free

When a person is willing to repent and believe all sins can be forgiven. This forgiveness comes to us through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. We are not forgiven because we have earned forgiveness or because we deserve to be forgiven. We are forgiven because of the Father's love for Jesus and as a result of the death of his Son on the cross. This was a death for our sins, that we may be forgiven, healed and restored. The emphasis of Mark is on this very point. It is made in the midst of another very significant message – Jesus has the power and authority of God to forgive sins. God and Satan are at war. However, as wars go it is a bit of a disappointment. As soon as Jesus appears on the scene, the demons fall to the ground, cry out and beg for mercy. It is a war without a fight, a war in which Satan and evil have no hope of victory. Whatever of external appearances – and it may seem that the forces of evil are all powerful and so very extensive – in Christ the victory has been won and the full extent of this victory will be apparent when the Son of Man returns in glory at the end of time.

But not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

The one exception to this otherwise universal divine guarantee is – *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*. What is this form of blasphemy? It only comes into play when people reject the very possibility of salvation being on offer from God in Christ. It is witnessed in those who intentionally turn their backs on God and arrogantly continue to pursue their own way in life. They replace the God revealed to us in the scriptures with a “god” made in their own image and likeness. They refuse to believe that the Spirit working away in Jesus is creating a whole new creation, a transformed world, one in which all men and women are renewed. They know of what God has done in His only Son but refuse to live out the consequences of that knowledge. This is not the same as not believing because I find faith difficult or because I have not heard of the great saving works of God. It is the sin of Adam and Eve – rejecting God for a form of self-rule. If they cannot believe even in the possibility of God's forgiving love, then they will not come to God and so they cannot be forgiven. If they do not ask they cannot receive.

We can't hide our sins from God

As it is with the situation with the Devil, we are all tempted to believe we can get away with breaches of our Christian responsibility. We appear to get away with sin. Nothing too bad happens and life seems to float along reasonably smoothly. And so, we minimize the seriousness of sin in life, dismiss the idea of a divine judgment and like Adam and Eve console ourselves with the idea that we can hide our sins from God. We can't. God knows and yet still loves us. God expects all of us to repent and seek forgiveness.

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