

Scriptural principles, he wins a battle. Like the hustler though, he will *never* let his victim know that he's a threat or the weapon of deceit is gone and the victim will no longer play his "game." So he'll be careful to not use a startling change that might shock or alert those whom he is trying to influence. Satan's subtle ways will most likely be quiet, unnoticed substitutions *almost* according to God's Word but — not quite. There are only two ways of "running" the New Testament Church — God's way and the Devil's way. *God's* way can only be found within the pages of the Scriptures. *Satan's* way may at times seem to be almost God like. His "suggestions" may excite us so much that we fail to see the wrong until it's too late — just like the victims of the card shark.

Another scheme Satan may use to seduce the Bride of Christ is to remove from her all Scriptural teachings that may be offensive to the taste of the world in general. While the true strength of a Church lies in its devotion to God and adherence to His Word, the Devil may convince it that its power and success is in the number of members it has or whether or not its pews are filled with fashion, intelligence, money, community influence or any number of other *material* measures that can quickly lead it into apostasy. Accomplishing this scheme reduces the church to nothing more than a human institution seeking popularity among the masses at the expense of adhering to the Word. Eliminating all difficult principles contained in the Bible may allow the Church to be *seen* as popular, modern and progressive. but it is then no longer the Body of Christ. It is controlled by Satan since it is then founded on principles pleasing to *fleshly* desires. Everything reeks of man and what pleases him instead of what is pleasing to *God*.

Other than God Himself, there is no more powerful spirit than Satan. There is no more crafty or subtle hustler than Satan. He will distress and defame those whom he *cannot* deceive. He even uses influential Christians to distort the Word *for* him! So in order to not be his victim, we must *know* that Satan is the Ultimate Hustler and stand firm, clothed in the armor of Ephesians 6.

*"Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth." (Ephesians 4:14 New Living Translation)*

Satan's scheme to eradicate or at least corrupt God's Word is his most skillfully used tool for advancing his plans. His evil trick of deception should be dealt with from a most serious standpoint. That's why we are instructed to —

*"Be sober. be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8 NKJV)*

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*"Diligence" is a privately funded publication of:  
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# DILIGENCE

*"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11*

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Volume 3

February 15, 2004

Issue 1

## The Devil, His Tricks And The Church — Part Two

As Christians, it's *necessary* that we fully understand the power of Satan to deceive faithful Christians. In this article we will be discussing how very subtle Satan can be in regards to influencing Churches. Let's use a secular example that might parallel the way the Devil uses evil tricks and schemes to accomplish his goal of winning souls to hell for all eternity.

Most of us have seen movies or read stories about the manner in which a card shark — or hustler — operates. First, and most importantly, the shark is *very good* at his game. But secondly and just as important, he is also able to *act* as if he knows very little about the game. Without the *act*, it's unlikely that he could hustle *anyone* — no one would bet against him if they knew he was such an expert at the game. So he proceeds to lose a few games in an effort to make it appear that he's not a very good player. He then gradually "sucks in" an opponent (or victim) into believing he could profit from the shark's ineptness. The hustler pretends that he's reluctant to bet on his own abilities since he's still acting as if those abilities are not very good. He even loses a few games to further lure his victim into the scam. He systematically deceives the victim into believing that all the *victim* has to do to *win* more money is convince the seemingly inept card player to *bet* more money. Once the victim has beat the shark several times and the stakes have become higher each time, the shark finally wins a high stakes game — seemingly by a stroke of good luck on the last play. Anxious to win back his lose, the opponent is carefully manipulated into suggesting a double or nothing game. The shark of course, wins by a last minute "lucky" play. The hustler can do this routine again and again, often with the very same victim, being sure to lose enough games to continue to appear inept but lucky. How does he get away with it? — by *never letting the victim know* that he *is* being hustled. The victim *still* believes that the shark "just got lucky" and *he* can win the *next* game. Eventually the hustler walks off with all the money because of his ability to *deceive* the victim. Obviously, the victim would not continue the game if he *knew* he was being deceived. By never revealing himself as a deceiver, the hustler simply roams from victim to victim, seeking whomever he wishes to devour. How is he continually successful? The victim *never* sees him as a threat.

*"One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you*

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*come from?’ Satan answered the Lord , ‘From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.’” (Job 1:6-7 NIV)*

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” (I Peter 5:8 KJV)*

Satan is real! His power to deceive is real! Hell for all eternity is real! If the shark’s victim had understood who he was up against, would the shark have been able to continue with the deception? Of course not. As soon as the victim became aware of the shark’s deceit, the shark would no longer have had a weapon. His victory was *only* because of his ability to deceive. Knowing the truth of the matter (that the victim was being deceived) would have immediately ended the shark’s “game.” The opponent’s weapon of *knowing the truth* would have been a fatal blow to the deceiver.

It’s obvious that Satan operates very much like the card shark. He is *very* careful to not allow his victims to know that they are being deceived. For it is through deception that Satan has such great power. When Jesus told Paul he would preach the Gospel to *all* the world (even the Gentiles) He said:

*“...I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:17-18 NIV)*

Satan, who is —

*“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (II Corinthians 4:4 NIV)*

The Devil’s greatest scheme is to not only blind the minds of unbelievers but also blind the minds of Christians and entire Churches so they too can not see “...*the light of the gospel...*” but will instead, follow after his lies. Satan is cunning. Satan is hateful. Satan is vile. But, through *obedience and faithfulness* to the glorious Gospel of Christ, he is also defeated. It is our battle as Christians, to not ignore his power to deceive but rather to —

*“...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.” (Ephesians 6:10-11 NIV)*

This verse says we need *armor* to stand against the Devil’s schemes. Later in this series we’ll be discussing in more detail the armor that is described in Ephesians 6:10-20. But for the moment let’s talk more about the attacks of the Devil. Satan *will* and *does* attack individual Christians *and* entire Churches. Each of us must be prepared for the attack *before* it happens. That preparation begins with a thorough knowledge of the Word. Remember the hustler? The victim wouldn’t have *been* a victim if he had known the truth about the hustler. As Christians we won’t be a victim of Satan if we know the Truth of God’s Word. John 17:17

says “...*thy Word is truth.*” Knowing the Word and not being afraid to use it as our Sword will defeat Satan, the Ultimate Hustler and Ultimate Deceiver. We *must always* be armed and ready to use our Sword as a weapon against the enemy whenever a battle arises. And those battles, are *never pleasant* to fight. They’re sometimes painful and difficult — but they are necessary. To walk away for fear of being wounded or because being a spiritual appeaser seems much easier, is to let Satan win. It is a gross misconception and misrepresentation of the Word of God to profess that a “good Christian” will never struggle or engage in conflict (see previous issue of *Diligence*). To teach that a “good Christian” will never suffer because their fabulous faith will keep them forever healthy, prosperous, and comfortable is not the faith of the “...*glorious gospel of Christ...*” The heroes of those who profess that *comfortable* kind of faith are the smooth talking, TV type Evangelists rather than those faithful Christians of the Bible who suffered much for the Gospel — people like Stephen (Acts 7) and Paul (II Cor. 11:16-33). Job probably suffered more than anyone we read of in the Scriptures, but yet he never gave up the fight. Satan is on the attack. Jesus has assured faithful Christians that they will be victorious in the end but for now, we are at war and don’t expect it to be easy.

*“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (I Peter 4:12-19 NIV)*

The Church is God’s army on this earth. It must be ready and willing to march into battle clothed in the armor of Ephesians 6:10-20. Its weapon must be “...*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*” (Eph. 6:17). Individual members of the Church cannot lie around weak and helpless while the battle is on. We must instead, pick up our Sword and engage in the war against Satan. He is much too ambitious and aggressive to confine his attacks to *only* individuals. Revelations 20:8 states that he goes out “...*to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth.*” (KJV). Satan is an expert who attempts to deceive individuals, nations and yes, even the Bride of Christ.

New Testament Churches are not exempt from Satan’s schemes. If he can seduce even one congregation from the purity of the Gospel by perverting