

4 Shocking Ways Evil Spirits Deceive—And How to Avoid Them

Deceitful, unclean spirits are always lurking in the shadows, looking for some way to dissuade us from faithfully following God. We need to be on our guard at all times. Their insinuations are deceptive, manipulative, seductive and alluring. Demons lure people from a position of stability into instability in an attempt to capture them in their web of lies.

“The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1).

We can count on the Holy Spirit to help us discern and detect the presence and tactics of enemy spirits. The brilliant light of heaven not only shines like a beacon to guide us, but it also exposes whatever is hiding in the darkness. By this light, we can both discern deceitful spirits and elude their manipulations as we pursue the one true God.

By growing in discernment, we can learn to recognize and expose demonic tactics. Demons operate in different ways in different circumstances, perpetrating error in the most advantageous way possible, using a number of strategies. Have you seen the following four tactics of the enemy at work in your heart or life? If so, root them out by the light and love of God!

By Exaggeration—Truth Wrapped in a Lie

Much of the seductiveness of the enemy's lies comes from the fact that they contain a kernel of truth. “You are sad, aren't you?” he whispers. “You will never get over that thing your brother did to you. It's really affecting your personality. Why not do something about it? Why not get even with him,

hmmm?"

It is true that your brother did something hurtful to you. It is true that you are sad. But the rest is an exaggeration and the beginning of an accusation. Soon a supposed "truth" is ringing in your head, and you lose sight of the real truth. An insinuation turns into a motivation to retaliate. You may have begun the day as a faithful follower, only to end it off in the weeds.

Paul was exasperated with the people of the church in Galatia because they so often fell for this trick of the devil, in which truth is mingled with falsehood. He wrote: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth? ... Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1, 3).

By Exalting a Special Revelation Above the Word of God

Uh-oh. This is a tricky one for people who are zealous to know God's revelation. If they do not watch out, they start holding the latest prophetic word higher than the Word of God.

"That was revealed to him by an angel, so it must be reliable!"

"The Bible can't cover everything; that's why God sends extra-special revelation like this."

"Get outta my way! Personal experiences don't lie!"

Obviously, I believe that God does send special revelation to His people—but never, ever should it be held in higher esteem than the written Word of God. Even though I myself have had a number of angelic visitations and supernatural experiences that are almost indescribable, I want to remain open to correction at all times, and I return to the "main and plain" message of Scripture all the time. The extras are just extra. My happiness, and especially my salvation, do not depend on

them. God helping me, I will always take seriously these warnings of Paul to the believers under his care:

Do not let anyone cheat you of your reward by delighting in false humility and the worship of angels, dwelling on those things which he has not seen, vainly arrogant due to his unspiritual mind, and not supporting the head, from which the entire body, nourished and knit together by joints and sinews, grows as God gives the increase" (Col. 2:18-19).

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not a gospel. But there are some who trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Although if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than the one we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so I say now again: If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than the one you have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

People too easily fall for the appeal of an exciting new message or its messenger, or they begin to say, "Oh well, if I can hear God for myself, then I don't have to pay as much attention to God's Word and what I already know to be true, because now I can just listen, and He's going to direct me." They may even back this approach up with a proof text such as this one: "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, 'saying, This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left" (Isa. 30:21). But again, remember that the Holy Spirit never contradicts God's Word.

Sometimes we become more susceptible to deception because of desperation. We so badly want healing or some kind of miracle for ourselves or for someone else that we will cling to a "word" that did not originate with God. Our emotional weak spots can become points of vulnerability for the enemy's alluring, fraudulent messages.

It is a slippery slope. One mild-sounding deception leads to worse ones. How else do you think people end up in cults or seriously off-balance?

By Prideful Self-Promotion

The devil loves to persuade people that they are better than others. Even though the Bible says clearly, "Do not forsake the assembling of believers" (see Heb. 10:25), such people become convinced that they are too big (too elite, too important, more educated, above criticism) to fellowship with ordinary Christians in an ordinary church. They position themselves above accountability, exalting their own giftedness or experience level.

Or they may buy into some trend in the church, even a genuine move of God, and make their association with it a source of personal pride. Eventually, they can become what I call "parked cars" in a cul-de-sac of yesterday's move of God. They have not moved forward with the Holy Spirit. They have not learned humility. They have not reached out to others with God's love.

The only cure is humility. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6, quoting Proverbs 3:34). Oh by the way, God does not humble us. He calls us to humble ourselves. Humility is our task, restoration and favor is God's!

Through Hero Worship

Another subtle deception of the enemy is hero worship. Along comes a preacher with a golden tongue, and blessings accrue to him. Soon he has a ministry, a slot on television or radio, and a new wardrobe. When he goes on the speaking circuit, people flock to hear him and, if they can get close enough, to take selfies with him.

It is the people I am concerned about, more than the so-called

hero, because hero worship has a way of taking worship away from the only one to which it belongs, God Himself. Another concern is that even if the hero slips into error, the people often do not want to hear about it. For now, I will push pause on specifics names of people and ministries and stay with the principle that there are gifted people who start off great but finish off-course, often due to their error or pressure to perform by those surrounding them.

We have had too much of this in church history. So watch out when you see someone drawing too much attention to himself or herself, or to gifts and experiences. It can happen again and it will. There is nothing new under the sun.

“Now the Spirit clearly says that in the last times some will depart from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared with a hot iron ...” (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

Reaching for a Higher Realm

Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (Phil. 1:9). The noblest use of our discernment is for it to enlighten the love that God pours into our hearts. Then we will walk in a spirit opposite to self-glorification and pride: “For in Him lives all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all authority and power” (Col. 2:9-10).

God gives us grace to live in His love: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and in godliness in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12). You can regain your place in that grace if you’ve lost it, but only if you surrender your claim to know what is right apart from God’s written Word.

I want to be a person who starts well by grace—and who also

finishes well. Don't you? So let's recognize and expose these subtle deceptive tactics of the enemy, and instead grow in discerning good and evil in Jesus' great name.