

# How the Devil Hides in Religion

**Has the American church given the devil a place to hide?**

Nobody I know has ever taken a photograph of the devil, and we couldn't find a recent snapshot to use on the cover of Charisma this month. The only images we located were paintings, drawings and a few sculptures—all based on artists' notions of what the Evil One must look like.

I certainly was not inclined to pursue an interview or a photo-shoot, since I really don't care to see Satan in person. But for the sake of journalistic accuracy I need to inform our readers that the red-faced monster we featured on our cover is probably not a realistic depiction.

Most of us tend to think of the devil as a grotesque creature: a half-man, half-reptile with forked tongue, goatee, black fingernails and creepy, Darth Vaderlike voice (and bad breath of the sulfuric variety). He's like all the things we feared most when we were kids: Dracula, Freddy Krueger or any twisted character played by Vincent Price. Kids today might give the "Most Like Satan" award to the dark wizard Saruman from The Lord of the Rings films.

But the issue for us is not whether the devil has pointed ears or carries a pitchfork. Regardless of his real appearance, he is a master of disguise. That's what makes him so dangerous.

We Christians are always on the lookout for the devil's work. But it seems we spend way too much energy looking in the wrong places for his fingerprints.

A few years ago, for example, some Christians worked overtime to inform parents about the evils of Pokémon, claiming that Satan was plotting to take over the minds of children by using

a Japanese cartoon. That was only after another group of Christians circulated a warning that a major U.S. household-products company was controlled by devil worshipers. (It wasn't.)

Today, many believers act as if the Harry Potter books are hell's primary tools to infiltrate our families with witchcraft.

I don't buy that. Satan is much more subtle.

The apostle Paul, who wrestled with plenty of demonic powers in his day, told us that we must know our enemy in order to outwit him. One thing we must understand is that the devil's primary target is the church—so he snoops around there a lot.

He comes “as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14, NASB) and is an imposter who claims to speak for God. He can mimic piety. He's OK with choir robes, clerical collars and the whole Sunday morning routine. He knows how to dress to fit in.

He detests genuine praise music that exalts God, but he's fine when he can turn worship into dead formality or manipulate it in a fleshly way to glorify the performer. He hates the Bible (because he must bow to its authority), but he has impressive knowledge of the Scriptures and can twist them to create false doctrines.

He despises preachers, but if he can tempt them to embrace greed or arrogance (or lure them into denominational politics), he can use them like puppets on a string. He hates it when Christians love each other, so he uses every trick in his bag to trigger jealousy, strife, divorce and painful church splits.

The apostle Paul didn't seem too concerned about the devil's influence in pagan culture. He was much more alarmed that Satan had infiltrated the church without anyone's knowing it.

“Who has bewitched you?” he asked the Galatians (Gal. 3:1). He told the Corinthians: “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Has the American church given the devil a place to hide? Satan thrives on religious hypocrisy. He also loves backbiting, pride, greed, selfish ambition and hidden perversion. As long as we tolerate such things, we create an atmosphere of spiritual compromise that attracts the enemy and gives him a safe haven.

Religious people don’t even realize they are part of this evil plot. But radical Christians who are full of the Holy Ghost must go on the offensive, chase Satan down, invade his territory and liberate his captives. When our masked enemy is faced with a church that walks in genuine love, Christlike humility, bold authority and biblical faith, he must tuck his scaly tail between his legs and run.

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