

Strategies of the Enemy: Identity

2 Corinthians 2:10-11

Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

One question we need to think through for ourselves is whether that last statement Paul makes in this passage is true for us. Are we ignorant of Satan's designs? Because if we are, then we are sure to be outwitted by him.

Several of the verses we looked at last week described sin and Satan as opportunistic. The enemy looks for open doors to enter and weaknesses to exploit. But while sin can create these loops of vulnerability and attack, remember this passage we looked at last week, too:

James 1:14-15

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Do we have to be actively sinning in order to be tempted to sin? What are two examples in the Bible that show temptations can happen to those who aren't in sin?

So the cyclical pattern we see sin and Satan operate in is:

So our next step is to consider where Satan attacks us in order to separate us from truth, each other, and ultimately God. Consider the first thing Satan says to Jesus in the wilderness:

Luke 4:3

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

This is clever. If Jesus does not turn the stone into bread, then what is Satan implying about Jesus? What aspect of Jesus is he going after?

Matthew 27:39-40

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Notice also the timing of both of these statements. These attacks are not hitting when Jesus is flipping tables, being transfigured, or in moments of strength. The first is when Jesus has been fasting for forty days and is *hungry*. The second is when He is actively being *crucified*.

What desire is the enemy hitting in these moments? Is that desire evil?

When you consider who you are, what things come to mind? Names and titles? Purpose and accomplishments? Gender and roles? List the things that come to mind about how you define yourself.

Now, Satan rarely invents new identities for us. He often doesn't need to. Instead, he simply distorts the identities we already have in several different ways.

Contradiction (Diminishment)

The most obvious distortion is the contradiction of declared identity. When did Satan question Jesus' identity? Right after he was baptized, God declared Jesus "My beloved Son."

Matthew 28:20b

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Psalm 42:10

As with a deadly wound in my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me all the day long,
"Where is your God?"

Diminishment doesn't just attack who we are in Christ, but it doesn't need to. As God's image-bearers, we have God-given worth, purposes, and callings, and diminishment can hit those areas, too.

How many times have we felt, believed, or even heard it said to us...

- You're a bad Christian
- You're a bad wife/mother
- You're not really loved/wanted
- You're a mistake
- If people really knew you...

Conviction is specific and leads you toward repentance and restoration.

Accusation is vague and drives you toward shame and distance.

Are any of those statements specific? Do any of them address a specific sin? What do those statements attack?

Satan's design here is **erosion**. He is contradicting that God has chosen you (1 Thessalonians 1:4), pursued you (Luke 15:4-7), claimed you (Isaiah 43:1), and secured you (John 10:28-29). All of which God did because God **loves** you.

Replacement (Displacement)

This distortion isn't isolated from contradiction, but can be distinguished in that it's not about tearing you down. It's about defining you by something other than Christ.

Genesis 3:5

you will be like God

Genesis 11:4

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

Displacement isn't just about pride and being bigger than God, though; it is about distorting our identity to focus on the wrong thing. It can be about elevating good things into ultimate things.

There is nothing wrong with being a...

- Wife
- Mother
- Leader
- Productivity Superstar
- Survivor

But when those parts of our identity become more important to us than Christ, we have entered into a problematic territory.

Matthew 10:37

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Satan's design here is **distraction** and **destabilization**. The enemy doesn't really care if you're standing in pride or shame, as long as it's displacing Christ. And as long as your identity is placed in something Satan can hurt, he can hit your identity whenever he wishes.

Mark 10:29-30

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Conditionalization

This is a form of the first identity distortion, but worth mentioning because it is particularly effective and common, especially among mature believers. It shows up in a couple of different ways.

Matthew 7:22-23

On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Galatians 3:2-3

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

First, we have what happens when we reduce the covenant with Christ to a transaction of works. These are people who believed their works identified them as followers, but failed to understand that the covenant is relational, not transactional.

Second, we have Paul correcting the idea that the Galatians were not truly saved until they were circumcised. They believed their salvation was conditional on a physical act in addition to receiving the Spirit.

This attack sounds like these statements:

- “If you were really saved, you wouldn’t struggle.”
- “If you really loved God, you wouldn’t doubt.”
- “If you can’t feel God, it means He’s not there.”
- “If you keep messing up, that’s proof.”

Satan’s design here is to **deceive** and **destabilize**. The unsaved do not realize they are because they are *doing* what they think is right. For the saved, we are destabilized if we believe our covenant with Christ is conditional. It turns God’s secure love for us into constant, conditional evaluation.

Romans 8:31-35, 38-39

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us

from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [...] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This Week's Takeaway

What is the enemy aiming to do when they undermine our identity in Christ?

How can we refute these attacks on our or God's identity?

What areas of my identity might be vulnerable to attack?

Preparing for Next Week

To prepare for class next week, read the following passages and write down a few observations for each passage. This isn't about right answers or deep insight, just jot down what you notice and what stands out in each passage, or what questions you may have.

Zechariah 3; Job 1:6-12; Job 2:1-10; Revelation 12:7-11; Luke 22:31-34; 1 John 3:19-20; Psalm 103;

Find these handouts and other resources at DeeplyBiblical.com