

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_anvil\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php)

CRAIG SMITH

---

# The Spiritual Enemy: The Response of the Church to Spiritual Pressure

**This is the third article in the *Love Your Enemies* series. Here Craig Smith considers the challenge of the 'Spiritual Enemy'. He begins by describing ritual deaths that accompany black magic and satanic rituals in some parts of the world. These acts reveal particular examples of spiritual enemies. Resisting some recent attempts to demythologize the present reality of spiritual enemies, he examines the New Testament view of Satan and demons finding them a real force for evil. He concludes by looking at the challenge to love those aligned with evil in situations where violence is done to Christians today.**

It started as a normal afternoon for 11 year old, Mojela Matthews, walking across the fields of maize outside his village 150 miles northeast of Johannesburg<sup>1</sup>. Normal, until he found 10 year old Sello Chokoe soaked in blood desperately attempting to raise his mutilated body. The savagery of Sello's attackers took place fifty yards away where he was held down by at least two, maybe more men, fully conscious while they hacked off his right hand, right ear and chopped a hole into his skull extracting a few slivers of his brain. After his assailants ran away Sello unbelievably raised his butchered body and staggered the fifty yards before collapsing in front of Mojela. It took ten long days before Sello finally died his senseless death.

Sello was the victim of a *muti*-murder. *Muti* in Zulu means 'medicine'. The parts of Sello and others are 'harvested' in order to be used in a black-magic ritual. In this case the hand was probably requested by a store-owner who would bury the hand in the doorway of his shop believing that it would attract customers by waving them in. His testicles would be procured by someone who may have had a problem of impotency, the ears by a person with impaired hearing. During the ritual the purchaser would have eaten the brain-slivers in order to improve his intelligence. This type of practice is more common than one might think stretching from Nigeria to Benin, South Africa to Tanzania. There are 300 deaths of this type recorded each year in South Africa alone.

---

1 Boggan, Steve. 'Where Were Their Eyes as This Boy Bled, Their Ears as He Screamed?' *The Times*, August 25 2004, pp 4-5.

In our Western culture it might be easy to think that this is something that happens 'over there', a tribal tradition which has not yet been eradicated. But police in the UK are realizing that some of the dismembered bodies and grisly deaths are used for multi-medicine and as sacrifices for black magic and satanic rituals<sup>2</sup>.

This story puts in graphic and uncomfortable terms at least the reality of evil and people who align themselves with evil. It would appear that there is a continuum of evil and this incident is certainly on the side of the more malevolent type. But the perpetrators of these insidious acts are religious, using their victims in their religious rituals. Through these acts of worship they are aligning themselves with a god with the view that it might act on their behalf. A story like this tends to make us look at these people as monsters forgetting that they were once small babies born in the image of God. Salome Chokoe, whose name ironically means peace, the mother of Sello, said 'they must have Satan, demons, inside them'. Is she correct? Is there a personal evil, an enemy who would prompt people to perform such acts?

The purpose of this article is to look at the issue of the spiritual enemies of the church: who are they and how is the church to love them? I will begin with the former question before tackling the latter one. It is beyond the scope of a paper this size to prove or disprove the reality of evil. This has been adequately addressed in other works and will not be repeated here.

### Who is a Spiritual Enemy?

According to Paul, when Christ came to earth God and humankind were enemies (Rom. 5:10). There are two sides to this enmity. On the one side humanity is hostile to God demonstrated by its violation of the Law (8:7) and penchant for idolatry (i.e. as Augustine said 'Idolatry is worshipping what should be used and using what should be worshipped'). To capture the essence of this idea Käsemann<sup>3</sup> translates *e?cqroi/* in Rom. 5:10 as 'rebels'; thus 'while we were rebels ... we were reconciled to God'. Equally on the other side God is hostile towards humanity because of its rebellion thereby incurring His righteous wrath (1:18-25) which is to be meted out on the day of judgment (2:5). In Eph. 2:1-3 Paul lists three compelling forces which have caused humankind to be hostile towards God: *the age of this world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the flesh*. As a result these people are enemies of God, spiritually dead, outside of Christ and in bondage to forces beyond their control (2:1).

The 'age of this world' refers to 'both the spatial and temporal aspects of fallen human existence'<sup>4</sup> which people have allowed to dominate their lives and to which they have aligned their values and ideologies. The 'flesh' represents that self-centered, independent sphere of humanity which is directly opposed to dependence on God, His ways and His Spirit (Rom. 8:6). The flesh affects every part of a person's being (Rom. 7:23) including the passions (Gal. 5:17) and mind (Eph. 2:3;

2 The London police are quite certain that the torso of the 6 year old boy found in the Thames River was the result of a ritual sacrifice. See also J. LaFontaine, *The Extent and Nature of Organised and Ritual Abuse*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London 1994.

3 E. Käsemann and G. W. Bromiley, *Commentary on Romans*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, p 139.

4 A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*. Word Books, Dallas 1990, p 95.

Rom 8:7). The 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' is the spiritual being who holds sway in this realm affecting humanity adversely. To be led by this spirit is to live contrary to the Spirit of God and it prohibits one from knowing the things freely given by God (i.e. salvation; 1 Cor 2:12). Christ alone can free a person from these compelling forces and bring about reconciliation to God. The result of faith in Christ is that a person moves from being an enemy of God to a friend of God seated in the heavenlies with Christ (Eph. 2:6). The believers' status before God and their orientation to the world, flesh and cosmos changes. Now the believer and God have the same enemies; the flesh, the age of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. It is the last one on which I would like to focus in examining and defining the spiritual enemy of the church.

### Satan the Ruler of the Air

The spiritual enemy of the Christian is first and foremost the *ruler of the kingdom of the air*. John describes him as the *ruler of the world* (Jn. 5:19; 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) as does Paul in 2 Cor. 4:4. He is equated to Satan or the Devil and reigns as leader over the kingdom of the air which is the realm in which he operates<sup>5</sup>. The air is equivalent to the heavenlies which is the realm in which all spiritual beings operate both good (i.e. angels; Rom. 8:37) and evil (i.e. the rulers, authorities, powers, dominions, spiritual forces, demons; Eph. 1:21; 6:12)<sup>6</sup>. The good news is that Jesus is Lord of the heavenlies seated far above Satan and his powers of this dark age (Eph. 1:20-21) and thereby showing the limited power of his reign and kingdom. Equally good news is the fact that the believer is seated in the heavenly realms thereby making Satan and his powers subject to him or her through belief in Christ.

There have been attempts to demythologise Eph. 2:2. Wink for example believes that the statement 'kingdom of the air' does not refer to the realm of spiritual beings but 'the invisible dominion or realm created by the sum total choices for evil'<sup>7</sup>. It is equivalent to the 'spirit of the cosmos' (1 Cor. 2:12), 'the pseudo-environment ... [of] ideologies, the Zeitgeist, customs, public opinion, peer pressure, institutional expectations, mob psychology, jingoistic patriotism, and negative vibes [sic. whatever this may be]'<sup>8</sup>. It is beyond the scope of this article to defend the reality of personal evil but I will make a few specific responses to Wink's claims. First I believe that what Wink describes as 'kingdom of the air' is more logically included in the previous phrase 'age of the world' and therefore means that he is making an undue repetition. Second he does not take into account the plethora

5 It is equally possible that this phrase in Eph 2:2 could be translated as 'the ruler [who is] the authority of the air' thereby stressing Satan's pre-eminence over those powers which reside in the air. Paul may have both ideas in mind.

6 The concept of the 'air' being the realm of demons is supported by many texts from the magical papyri too (e.g. 'And again I charge you by the one who is in charge of the air' PGM Cl.39; 'protect me from every demon of the air' PGM I.97-194). Judaism

takes the same position (e.g. 'the dwelling of the [sic. evil] spirits... is the earth' 1 Enoch 15:10). For additional examples see C. E. Arnold, *Ephesians, power and magic: the concept of power in Ephesians in light of its historical setting*, vol. 63. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp 60,191.

7 W. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, vol. 1. Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1984, p 84.

8 Wink, *Naming the Powers*, p.84.

of references to people's belief during this period in demonic beings<sup>9</sup>. Third to remove the reality of Satan and evil beings from the NT as personal beings<sup>10</sup> makes the doctrine of God, humankind and salvation untenable<sup>11</sup>. Fourth to demythologise these personal spiritual beings creates a strange situation in which Jesus confronts these entities as personal beings but whose existence He disbelieves. Paul is caricatured in the same way. It is also hard to imagine that their audiences would be able to discern they were doing this. Fifth demythologisation of evil is a Western construct often made up in the minds of the academics divorced from the experiential realities of personal evil. But in other countries belief in Satan and evil spirits is accepted because it has been experienced.

In part I am writing this article because I have experienced in my ministry the reality of Satan and his evil spirits. These experiences were seldom but real. So my writing is not simply an academic venture. It is a practical and experiential one though I want biblical exegesis to support my thought. Looking back over history one can see that there were periods (e.g. the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions) when people were obsessed with evil spirits coupled with naive highly spiritualized portrayals of reality. Thankfully the Enlightenment brought an end to this way of thinking<sup>12</sup>. But has our *enlightenment* become the very frame of mind which has blinded us to the one who comes as an angel of light? My hope in this article is to stem the tide of demythologisation, keeping our eyes open for these evil forces and especially those people who have aligned themselves to these evil powers. It is this latter category to which I now turn because I believe that these people may be the most difficult to love and reach with the gospel.

## The Person Aligned with Evil

The primary spiritual enemy of Christians is Satan. But their spiritual enemy is also the person who is aligned, consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally (in much the same way a person may sin), with the ruler of the world and his evil minions. The major ways in which a person in the first century Greco-Roman period may have been influenced by evil power is through a direct

---

9 Charlesworth's comment about the demonology of the Pseudepigrapha is appropriate here: "The earth is full of demons. Humanity is plagued by them ... The Region between heaven and earth seems to be almost cluttered by demons and angels; humanity is often seen as a pawn, helpless in the face of such cosmic forces" (J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 1st ed. Doubleday, Garden City 1983, p 66).

---

10 Wink defines Satan as 'the real interiority of a society that idolatrously pursues its own enhancement as the highest good' (W. Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, vol. 2. Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1986, p 25).

11 As Green says 'You cannot simply write him [sic. Satan and his evil forces] out of the story and then imagine that the story is basically the same' (M. Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall*. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1981, p 22).

12 See N. G. Wright, *A Theology of The Dark Side*. Paternoster Press, Carlisle 2003, pp 4-5.

encounter with the Devil or his powers, involvement with pagan cults<sup>13</sup>, magic<sup>14</sup> and astrology<sup>15</sup>. There are several examples of these in biblical and extra-biblical texts of which I shall sample a few in a subsequent section.

The degree to which someone would be affected by these evil powers varies to the extent that one is demonized and the degree of faith they had in the powers behind these cults. There is a continuum of demonization in humankind then and now since we live in the overlap of the ages. It ranges from those who have allowed themselves to be controlled by evil (Manasseh in *Mart. Is.* 2:2 or present day satanists) or those who in their weakness have been subjugated or have succumbed to evil to the point that they are powerless to resist evil (e.g. some victims of satanic ritualistic abuse), to believers who wrestle with the flesh or experience the ongoing effect of spiritual attack but are free to resist these through the Spirit.

## Why Love Our Spiritual Enemies?

Paul states that there is a war raging within the believer (Rom. 7:23). This war is the battle between the kingdom of God/light/good and the kingdom of the enemy/darkness/evil; for evil has no right to exist<sup>16</sup>. Loving our spiritual enemies is only an extension of this war outside of ourselves. To engage in this war is to follow in the footsteps of Paul who on the Damascus road heard Jesus' commission '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 26:18); it is to fulfill the purpose of Jesus 'to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide [their] feet into the path of peace' (Lk 1:79). Therefore it is our calling which is contiguous with Christ's calling, namely 'to destroy the Devil's work' (1 Jn 3:8).

## Examples of Loving One's Spiritual Enemy

### Exorcisms

The clearest examples in the NT of someone coming in contact with a spiritual enemy are the exorcisms. These are the continuation of the cataclysmic fight with evil which began at Jesus' temptation after He was introduced as heir to the throne of God at His baptism. Since Jesus' purpose for coming to earth was to destroy the Devil's work then it is not surprising to find that there was an increase of demonic activity at His first coming. This demonic activity will continue to exist and possibly increase until His second coming when Jesus' fight with Satan and evil consummates (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

---

13 Balch list three types of cults which were prevelant in the social life of the Greco-Roman cities; the Olympian gods, ruler cult, mystery cult and oriental cult (J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians*. SPCK, London 1986, pp 127-37).

14 McRay concluded that 'the majority of the people in the Roman Empire were pagans, given to polytheism and idolatry' so that they might receive supernatural power in

---

order to manipulate the spiritual world in their favour (J. McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 2003, p 73). Of course, the reverse was true, they were the ones being manipulated.

15 See C. E. Arnold, "The 'Exorcism' of Ephesians 6:12 in Recent Research," *JSNT*, 30 (1987), pp 75-77.

16 Wright, *A Theology of The Dark Side*, p 31.

The NT portrays demons affecting people in a variety of ways and manifesting different symptoms<sup>17</sup>. Some demons manifest their activity in people through sickness. The woman crippled for eighteen years is said to have had a spirit of sickness (Lk. 13:11-12). Dumbness (Lk. 11:14; Mt. 9:32-34), deafness (Mk. 9:25) and seizures (Mt. 17:15), fever (Lk. 4:38-39, though spirit is not mentioned Jesus does rebuke the fever in the same way as in an exorcism) and madness (Lk. 4:33-34; Mk 5:5,7,15<sup>18</sup>; Jn. 10:19-21<sup>19</sup>) are attributed to the work of demons. Matthew places demonization under the broad rubric of sickness and exorcism under the heading of healing (Mt. 4:24; 17:16-19).

Yet he is also clear that there is difference between being demonized and being sick though in some cases an illness may be manifested by a demoniac since in Mt. 4:24 he distinguishes between those who were demonized from those who were epileptics. Twelftree has shown convincingly that the symptoms associated with demonization and traditional sicknesses are different<sup>20</sup>.

Demons may manifest themselves through great demonstrations of strength and powers of control. The man from Gadarene could not be chained (Mk. 5:3-4) and similarly the demonized man in Ephesus overpowers and beats up the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:16). In some cases the demons are able to exert control over their host's body by speaking through him (Mk. 1:23; 5:7), throwing him down (9:18a) and foaming at the mouth (9:18b).

There is one NT example in which a demon manifests itself as the 'spirit of python'<sup>21</sup> through a young girl giving her the power of divination (Acts 16:16). More examples of this kind exist outside the NT. For the Greeks, though, this ability was not necessarily regarded as bad and certainly not in need of exorcising. This may explain the angry response of the Greeks to Paul's exorcism of this girl's demon in Philippi<sup>22</sup>.

By far the majority of the NT references to the affect of demons on a demonized person is the violent nature of these beings. Their nature is consistent with the character of Satan who is referred to as the *destroyer* (Rev. 9:11) and labelled as a *murderer* from the beginning by Jesus (Jn. 8:44). His nature is predatory and destructive prowling around like a lion seeking to devour someone (1 Pet. 5:8). These demons produce violence *against their host*. Like Satan they may act directly causing great suffering (Mt. 17:15). The gospel writers use graphic language to describe this phenomenon as tearing the person apart (Lk. 9:39b) and crushing

17 Sorensen notes that the spirits who afflicted people are sometimes described 'by what they accomplish in the individual'. Thus there are references to dumb and deaf spirits (Mk. 9:17,25), a spirit of sickness (Lk. 13:11) etc. (E. Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, vol. 157. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2002, p 122).

18 In the beginning of the story the man of Gerasene screams out in a crazed fashion (5,7) which is considered to be a sign of madness. But at the end of the story he is in his right mind (15).

19 In this text the crowd say that 'he [Jesus] is demon-possessed and raving mad' thus connecting demonization and madness.

20 G. H. Twelftree, *Christ Triumphant: Exorcism Then and Now*. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1985, p 71.

21 Python was the mythical serpent who guarded the oracle at Delphi but who was later defeated by Apollo. Subsequently the name became associated with those who could reveal the future.

22 Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, pp 91-95.

him (Lk. 9:39a). More specifically demons may shake the person (Mk. 1:26), throw him to the ground (Mk. 9:18) or even throw him into water or fire in an attempt to kill him (Mk. 9:21). They may act indirectly causing the demonized person to self-harm (much like anorexics) by cutting himself with stones (Mk. 5:5) or by gnashing his teeth (Mk. 9:18)<sup>23</sup>. Their indirect action may include prompting them into self-deprecation by refusing to wear clothes (Lk. 8:22a) or by living in isolation (Lk. 8:22b; much like many street people today living in car parks<sup>24</sup>).

But these demons also produce violence *against others through their host*. These people may become violent towards others<sup>25</sup> (Lk. 8:29a; Acts 19:13-16; including animals Mk. 5:11-13) and arrogant (Mk. 5:6-7; demon feigns worship and attempts to gain control over Jesus with an exorcism formula). The young slave girl was not physically violent but her divinations were destructive for her listeners. For one author states that the problem with soothsayers is that '[they] say some things that are true, for the devil fills them with spirit to see if he will be able to break some of the righteous' (Herm. *Man.* 11.43.3). It is for this reason Paul expels the demon.

Surprisingly the NT is silent about how a person becomes demonized. The demoniacs portrayed in the NT are already in the state of being severely demonized. Mk. 5:12-13 suggests that demons take residence in people to avoid being in a bodiless state wandering in places, like deserts (5:10) because in general they do not have people resident whom they can embody and afflict (Lk. 11:24-26). The Abyss would be the quintessential desert which they fear the most (Lk. 8:31) because it is the place of torment set aside for them until the appointed time. People are not born demoniacs in the NT (cf. Mk. 9:21; demonization was from childhood not birth) though in *Test. Sol.* 12:2 a demon is recorded as responsible for creating blindness, deafness and dumbness in the womb.

The gospel writers rarely mention anything about Jesus' attitude towards the demoniacs He exorcises. Their interest in presenting the exorcisms, in terms of strength and violence, is to prove the power and presence of the Kingdom of God (Lk. 11:20). But I suggest that His attitude is the same one He had towards those He healed, namely compassion. Nine times compassion<sup>26</sup> is given as the basis for His ministry either referring directly to His attitude towards people (9 times) or indirectly to His motivation for ministry through parables (2 times).

To exorcise a demon is an act of love. There is a clear distinction in Jesus' mind about who is the enemy in a demonized person. The enemy is clearly the demon because it stands against the Kingdom of God and against the well-being of the demonized person. Whereas the person is the focus of Jesus' love. Jesus' goal is his well-being and release from bondage. Therefore to love this spiritual enemy is to confront, fight and eradicate the evil within. Exorcism is thus an exception to the rule of Mt. 5:39 'do not resist an evil person'. Jesus confronts in

23 *Test. Sol.* 12:2 is an interesting parallel to Mk. 9:17-18; 'I strike men against the body and I make them fall down, foam at the mouth, and grind their teeth'.

24 When I worked as a missionary in the Philippines one of the places the destitute lived was in the graveyards.

25 The author of Jubilees states that demons seek the sacrifice of children (*Jub.* 1:11). This text goes some way to explain the actions of Ahaz and Manasseh who sacrificed their sons (2 Ch. 28:3; 33:6).

26 The verb, *splagcni-zomai*, 'to have compassion on someone' is used 12 times in the NT.

strength the demonized person not permitting him or her to exercise its destruction on themselves or on another person. Through exorcism Jesus makes the demoniac an empty vessel which can now experience more fully the Spirit of God if the soul so chooses.

To exorcise a demon is a loving act of intercession. Exorcism is needed when someone is demonized to the extent that he or she needs someone to act on their behalf. In none of the NT exorcisms is the demonized person asked to exercise their faith to expel the demon (cf. some physical healings require faith to be exercised by the sick person ; Mk. 5:34; 10:52). The onus of responsibility is upon the exorcist to have the faith to expel the demon. Severely demonized people because of their weakness need an advocate and intercessor (Ps. 72:12-14; 82:3-4). In Mt. 15:22 the Syrophenician woman says that her daughter is 'demonized badly' suggesting that there were different degrees to which someone could be demonized. She had the faith in Jesus to expel the demon but she lacked the expertise to do it herself. In Mk. 9:21-24 the father's faith is less certain about Jesus' ability to exorcise the demon so Jesus takes the opportunity to encourage the father to exercise his faith. For those believers who have sufficient faith they are to engage in their own spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-20).

To exorcise a demon is a loving act of purification. Because demonized persons are indwelt by an unclean spirit they are considered impure in much the same way a person with a certain disease (e.g. leprosy) was declared unclean. For a Jew this would mean exclusion from the covenantal community of Israel. For a Gentile this may mean rejection from the secular community too since the demoniac would be viewed as mad. The curse, therefore, of demonization is ostracism, isolation and loneliness. Through exorcism the demoniac moves from being declared unclean to clean (cf. Jesus' command to the leper to see the priest in order to be reinstated into the community). It is also the means by which the demoniac can be reinstated into the community by restoring the person from being an outsider of the community to an insider. In Mk. 5:19 Jesus recognises the demoniac's need for community so He sends him home instead of following Jesus who has no place to lay His head (cf. Mary Magdalene; Lk. 8:2). Similarly the church today needs to follow Christ's example of setting people free so that they might be included in community.

### **Judas and Jesus**

His name Iscariot (ish cariot) simply means 'a man from Kerioth' and like Mary Magdalene (i.e. Mary of Magdala; cf. *m. 'Abot* 1:3) it tells people from where he came. Kerioth-Hezron is a small Judean town about 32 miles south of Jerusalem (Jos. 15:25; cf. Je. 48:24,41; Am. 2:2). Judas was therefore the only disciple who did not come from Galilee. There is a good chance that he shared the same views as other Judeans about the Galileans: because they were surrounded on three sides by Gentiles<sup>27</sup> they were too influenced and integrated with this culture. Judas may also have had concerns for the upholding of the Law and Temple or nationalist tendencies which in part may explain why he betrayed Jesus. Nevertheless Jesus chose him.

---

<sup>27</sup> See J. H. Paterson, "Galilee," in *New Bible Dictionary*, J. D. Douglas, Ed., (2nd ed) InterVarsity Press Leicester, England 1982, p 402.

What is more surprising is that Jesus chose him knowing his character. John says that he was a thief (Jn. 12:6) yet Jesus gives him charge of the treasury funds. Teachers would sometimes assign this position to their disciples<sup>28</sup> because they would be trustworthy with the funds but also have the same basic philosophy about money that the teacher had. Judas was not above stealing the money and ironically he did not share the same interests with respect to how the money should be used. Whereas Jesus cared about the poor and sought to help them in whatever way needed. Judas 'did not care about' the poor in the same way that the hired hand does not care about the sheep (10:13)<sup>29</sup>. By choosing Judas for this position Jesus was exposing Himself and His ministry to possible ridicule, scandal and claims of using ministry as a pretense for greed, which was something frowned upon (1 Thes. 2:5). Nevertheless Jesus stuck with him.

Equally surprising is the fact that Jesus chose Judas even though He knew that he would one day betray Him to death (Jn. 6:64). Throughout Jesus' public ministry Judas is included as an insider experiencing the intimacy of working and living with Christ. As a disciple he experiences Jesus' teaching and healing ministry before he is sent out with authority on a healing, exorcising, preaching ministry of his own, with the other disciples (Mt. 10:1,4ff.). Jesus treated him the same as the other disciples.

Judas is primarily referred to by the NT writers in terms of his actions during the passion. He is the *traitor* (Lk. 6:16); the *betrayor* (lit. 'the one who handed Him over'; Jn. 18:2,5); and 'the *guide* for those who seized Jesus' (Acts 1:16). But in Jn. 6:70 he is referred to as a 'devil'. This term may be conveying the idea of demon possession since elsewhere, John distinguishes between a *devil* from those *of the devil*. The latter is a broad designation about anyone who does what is sinful (1 Jn. 3:8,10) and are led away by the Devil whose goal is to lead people astray to do his will (Rev. 12:9). More likely though it is stressing his alignment with the Devil's scheme and pointing forward to his role as an agent of the Devil when he will make his move to betray Jesus at the Last Supper (Jn. 13:2,27). Through this act Judas is aligning himself with Satan's will and kingdom though under the direct influence of Satan.

Because of Judas' alignment with darkness Jesus says at the foot washing ceremony that Judas is 'unclean' (13:10). Though Jesus washed Judas' feet it was ineffectual because he was rejecting the Word. Metaphorically he needed a bath. He was unclean because he was aligned with an unclean spirit.

Prior to the Passover meal Satan had prompted Judas to betray Jesus (lit. 'thrown into his heart'; 13:2). Though Judas does not decide to betray Jesus until the taking of bread in 13:27, clearly Judas has been ruminating on this idea and Satan has been applying pressure to his weakest points. Commentators point to greed as the motive for his betrayal (the thirty pieces of silver; Mt. 26:15). Possibly it was his frustration with Jesus' unwillingness to use force as the Messiah to free Israel from the yoke of Rome. Or maybe it was annoyance at Christ for setting Himself above the Law (Mt. 5:21-22; Rom. 10:4) and Temple (Mt. 12:6) and thereby posing a threat to the survival of Israel (Mt. 24:2). Whatever the reason Judas was clearly disillusioned with Jesus and was taking drastic action.

---

28 *Pesiq. Rab.* 25:2; C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* Hendrickson Publishers Inc., Peabody 2003, p 865.

29 The same word is used in each context; Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, p 864.

The response of Jesus towards Judas throughout His public ministry is amazing since He is faithful to him and treats him as an equal with the other disciples. But at no time is Christ's faithfulness, love and generosity more evident to His spiritual enemy than at the Lord's Supper. Before Jesus shares the bread with Judas (13:20) He shows His awareness of Judas' contempt for Him through the quotation in Jn. 13:18. Here Jesus quotes the words of Ps. 41:9b, 'he who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me'. To show the bottom of your feet in that culture was considered an act of contempt. It would be in the same vein as shaking off the mud on the bottom of one's feet (cf. Mk. 6:11) but more derisive. Furthermore betrayal of a friend was considered terrible (Sir. 22:21-22; *Test. Jud.* 23:3) but betrayal at a meal would have been considered quintessentially despicable. Within the culture of the day sharing a meal was a means of establishing friendship, reconciling enemies, creating treaties and covenants and was held in the highest regard, so that to injure or slay someone who had eaten at the same table would 'incur divine wrath'<sup>30</sup>. E.F. Bishop writes that Judas lifting his heel to Jesus suggests that 'in his inmost attitudes he really despised his Master'<sup>31</sup>.

Judas' action is particularly painful for Jesus because He loved him. The clause omitted<sup>32</sup> in Jn. 13:18 which precedes Ps. 41:9b says 'even my close friend whom I trusted' shows how Jesus views Judas. Judas is a close friend even though he is a spiritual enemy. Jesus demonstrates this love by giving Judas the seat of honour at the Passover meal. Jesus does not hold back His grace from Judas. He offers Judas the bread which is His body given for him (Lk. 22:19). He allows Judas the freedom to choose Him and when he chooses Satan He asks him to carry out his diabolical plan quickly because of the pain his betrayal causes Jesus (Jn. 13:27).

## The Importance of Humility

One characteristic about Jesus stands out among the many in His battle against the spiritual enemy, humility. It is humility that unglues the Devil at the temptation and it is Christ's humility which eventually breaks Judas.

According to Mark, Jesus is 'cast out', *exballo*, (ejkba/llw) into the wilderness by the Spirit in order to be tempted by Satan (Mk. 1:12). He does not resist the direct leading of the Holy Spirit choosing instead to accept it as an expression of the sovereignty of God. He does not retreat from His spiritual enemy rather He takes His stand in the wilderness. The wilderness is the realm of Satan replete with wild beasts. These *wild beasts* are not to be taken literally but metaphorically as spiritual beings (Ps 91:13<sup>33</sup>; Lk 10:19<sup>34</sup>; *Test. Naph.* 8:4<sup>35</sup>) who are associated with the realm

30 Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, p 913. For details on the role of meals see J. Neusner, *A short history of Judaism : three meals, three epochs*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1992 and Neyrey's work on the subject (<http://www.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/meals.html>).

31 E. F. F. Bishop, "He That Eateth Bread with Me Hath Lifted Up His Heel Against Me": John 13:18," *ExpTim*, 70 (1958-59), p 332-33.

32 The omission may reflect John's attitude toward Judas who is consistently put in a negative light because he killed his best friend.

33 'You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent'.

34 'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy.'

35 'The devil will flee from you; wild animals will be afraid of you, and the angels will stand by you'.

of Satan (Ez. 34:5,8,25,28; *Test. Iss.* 7:7; *Test. Ben.* 5:2). It is within this difficult context that Jesus overcomes Satan. He does this by trusting in the care and provision of God (i.e. the bread), by accepting and not doubting the character of God (i.e. the temple) and by giving uncompromising loyalty to God (i.e. the mountain). At the heart of Christ is the willingness to give up the right to be God (Phil 2:6-7) and to choose to trust the Father. This humility is antithetical to the character of Satan who wanted and grasped at being equal with God. Failing at the temptation Satan left until an 'opportune time' (Lk. 4:13). This opportune time comes again at the Last Supper (Lk. 22:6) where the same word is used thereby creating a linguistic link<sup>36</sup>. But in this scenario Satan uses Judas to help him do his work. Here Jesus humbles himself before Judas by taking off his outer garment and washing his feet. In this act Jesus was overcoming evil with good though the temptation there was to be overcome with evil (Rom. 12:21). Jesus does not rejoice over Judas' fall (Pr. 24:17). More importantly Jesus does not seek revenge or stop Judas rather he trusts in God's righteousness and judgment. The effect of His actions was 'to heap burning coals on his [Judas'] head' (Pr. 25:22a). The aim of this proverb and Jesus in this situation is reconciliation. Jesus acting in love leaves Judas seeing more clearly the sinfulness of his actions and feeling more acutely the pain of his guilt and condemnation. Jesus hopes that His actions will weigh on Judas and move him to repentance and faith in order to lose this burden. It is interesting to note that the second half of verse 25:22 says 'and the Lord will reward you' when you take this attitude. For Jesus this means His vindication and the salvation of Judas.

I believe that Matthew's gospel suggests Judas' redemption. When Judas hears the verdict of death for Jesus he 'repents', *metameletheis*, *metamelhqe*i/β (Mt. 27:3). This is the same verb that is used in Mt. 21:29,32 which about those who say they are going to do something but do not only later to change their mind (i.e. repent) and do it. There is some difference in the two stores. In Mt. 21:28-32 the person is asked to do something good but does not then changes his mind and does it. But Judas is asked to do something bad which he does and then repents in the sense of remorse since there is no chance for him to change his mind because the deed has been committed. Yet there is a strong connection between the two stories; both stories are about the requirement of repentance for entering the Kingdom of God. The characters in both stories repent and enter the kingdom of God. Judas' repentance is demonstrated by returning the money and acknowledging he sinned. The depth of his repentance is seen in his suicide.

## Peter and Simon the Sorcerer

Luke describes Simon as a man who practised magic/sorcery with great success amazing many people over an extended period of time with his art (Acts 8:9-11). His pride, though, was probably as large as his talent, boasting as he did that he was someone great and possibly unique<sup>37</sup>. The adulation of his crowds only fueled his perception as the people of both low and high estate claimed that he was 'the power of God which is called "the Great"' which is a designation of divinity, possibly as the incarnation of Zeus<sup>38</sup> (cf. Acts 14:12).

36 J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*. William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1997, p 753.

37 The Greek may allow this idea putting the emphasis on certain (tina); 'saying that he himself was a certain great man'.

38 See Haacker, K. NIDNTT, III, p 457.

For the Jews sorcery was associated with witch-craft and evil. It was condemned by God (Ex. 22:18; cf. Je. 27:9) and considered to be the antithesis of hearing the voice of God through a prophet (Dt. 18:10,14-20). The latter text is interesting in light of Acts 8 since Jesus is *the* prophet of this text whose words must be obeyed in contrast to a prophet who presumptuously speaks for God or speaks in the name of another god. Simon and Elymas (Acts 13:6) come under the latter two categories. Simon therefore is clearly aligned with evil. Furthermore calling himself divine puts himself in the same danger as Herod who discovered he was not divine (Acts 12:22,23)<sup>39</sup>.

Luke makes an intentional contrast between Simon and Philip. The people of Samaria had been recently paying attention to Philip's teaching and miracles (8:6). Simon had been enjoying for some time the attention (8:10; n.b. the same verb is used) of the people for his miraculous work. But when Philip comes on the scene the people change their allegiance and so does Simon. The text says that he believed and was baptized like the other Samaritans (8:12,14,16). There is nothing in the text to suggest that his conversion was superficial or insincere<sup>40</sup>. His conversion was simply incomplete. He had not yet received the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (2:38). When he saw the fruit of receiving the Holy Spirit in his fellow citizens he desired to buy it. But the Holy Spirit was not for sale, though Simon does get his first taste of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit when Peter rebukes him for not having his heart right with God, and commands him to repent in order to find forgiveness.

The stiff rebuke comes because Peter sees two major problems with Simon. First he has a lust for power. He does not simply want to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in himself rather he wants the right to pass it on to others. Simon misunderstood: the ministry of Christ is a privilege not a right. Second he had a misaligned heart in two ways: he thought he could buy this power and right, and that through having this power he would gain further personal acclamation and praise. These problems can be overcome if he repents.

If Simon is the same Simon the heretic who led many astray into gnosticism then it is clear that he squandered his faith and did not respond to the stiff rebuke with humility and repentance. Peter's observation may in part be prophetic for he says that Simon is in bondage to wickedness (from his past) and full of bitterness but that he is heading towards increased bondage and bitterness<sup>41</sup>. This bitterness (lit. into gall of bitterness), when seen in light of Heb. 12:15, refers to his frustration due to his inability to procure what can only be received by grace; when seen in light of Dt. 29:17, it points to the 'bitter results for himself'<sup>42</sup> and the people he deceives<sup>43</sup>.

39 Hippolytus years later confirms Simon's alignment with evil and his claim to divinity (Hippol., *Haer.* 6.2, 15).

40 The later-Simon, who became the arch-heretic and opponent of Christianity, is too often read back into this text.

41 The preposition *eis* (ei?B) is to be taken with both nouns (i.e. gall and bond) in the *directional* sense.

42 Hippolytus tells the story that Simon after repeated conflicts with Peter decided in an attempt to show his superiority told his disciples to bury him alive and after three days he would rise up. They obeyed but he remained in the ground 'for he was not the Christ' (Hippol., *Haer.* 6.15).

43 I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: an introduction and commentary*, (1st American ed.), Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, 1980, p 159.

What is shocking about Simon is that he participated in the Christian community even though he was still aligned with evil. Possibly the same is true about Ananias and Sapphira. This latter story can only make sense as a true story if their character is dubious in the same way as that of Achan who sinned against God (Jos. 7:16-26). These people remind me of the story about the parents of Bobby in Scott Peck's book *People of the Lie*<sup>44</sup>. Bobby was sent to Peck, a psychiatrist, because he was depressed and recently had stolen a car. In the first consultation Bobby sat slumped in his chair rarely looking up, picking deeply into the sores scattered across his forearm. Peck got nowhere asking questions about his depression, so he turned the subject to an innocuous subject and asked what he got for Christmas. Bobby hesitantly said he got a gun. But this was not any gun. It was the same rifle which his brother had used the previous year to kill himself. When Peck brought in the church-attending parents they had all the outward appearances of concerned parents; the wife even broke down in sobs when she entered the office asking if Bobby was in danger of hurting himself. When he asked if they could think of any reason for Bobby's depression and behaviour. They drew blank faces. Finally when they were confronted about the gun they could not see anything wrong with their gift. Drawing on Buber's insights<sup>45</sup> Peck observes that

The words 'image', 'appearance', and 'outward' are crucial to understanding the morality of evil. While they seem to lack any motivation to *be* good, they intensely desire to appear good. Their 'goodness' is all on a level of pretense. It is, in effect, a lie. This is why they are the 'people of the lie'<sup>46</sup> ... Since the primary motive of evil is disguise, one of the places evil people are most likely to be found is within the church. What better way to conceal one's evil from oneself, as well as from others, than to be a deacon or some highly visible form of Christian within our culture? ... evil people tend to gravitate toward piety for the disguise and concealment it can offer them<sup>47</sup>.

Peck, reflecting on Bobby's case and others like it, concluded that 'I have learned nothing in twenty years that would suggest that evil people can be rapidly changed by any means other than raw power'<sup>48</sup>. This may go some way to explaining why Peter rebukes Simon so boldly (and possibly Ananias and Sapphira too). Simon loved evil and he loved power. Peter responded through a power that was greater than evil and any power Simon could name.

The quotation also tells us that people aligned with evil love to spend their energy on looking good rather than being good. In the case of Simon, he loved the respect and adulation of the people and would probably go to great lengths to keep these. This is why people aligned with evil are sometimes so hard to detect. They cover their lives in pretense and avoid the exposure of the light of truth (Jn. 3:20). Great discernment is needed but also a brave heart to confront and expose

---

44 S. Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983.

45 M. Buber, *Good and Evil*. Translated by M. Bullock, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953.

---

46 Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, p 75.

47 Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, pp 77-78.

48 Buber, *Good and Evil*, p 68.

them (Eph. 5:11). Peter was not afraid to go out on the limb for the gospel. He was able to see that the best thing for a person like Simon was to be confronted with the truth about himself and the kingdom of God. For Peter was no stranger to this type of rebuke. Paul literally 'condemned Peter to his face' when he was not acting in accordance with the gospel (Gal. 2:11). People aligned with evil want to avoid the pain of knowing the truth. Thus Peter confronting Simon was a great act of love because he was giving Simon a chance to change. Similarly when Paul confronts Elymas, who was opposing the faith and perverting the truth, he promulgates his temporary blindness. In doing this Paul was giving him a chance to find the truth just as Paul had after he had groped around in the darkness<sup>49</sup> (Acts 13:8-11).

## Conclusion

The primary spiritual enemy is Satan. But for the believer those who are aligned with evil present a specific group of people for whom the admonition 'love your enemy' (Mt. 5:44) has special pertinence. To love this spiritual enemy is an expression of our freedom and responsibility in Christ.

These spiritual enemies vary in degree of evil, in proportion to how much they have aligned themselves to evil or submitted themselves to be controlled by evil. The paradigm of Jesus is crucial in understanding how we are to love these people. Humility is vital entrusting ourselves to God's care and provision choosing to lay down our lives for our enemies. Our call to this type of radical self giving is simply a response to God's prior radical self giving. We are not to be bound in hatred. Instead we must demonstrate His paradigmatic 'authentic love'<sup>50</sup> which obliges us to discern the needs of others seeking their good and expressing the grace and love of God's kingdom at our personal cost. But equally loving is to confront and eradicate this evil for the sake of the person so aligned. For only then will they be free to love God, themselves and the world.

Love is stronger than evil. The power of love needed to love our spiritual enemy must be equal to or greater than the degree to which a person is conscious of and intent on using evil. But the ramifications of loving one's spiritual enemy are cosmic. The following story demonstrates these ideas.

The setting is the civil war in San Salvador in the 1980s and the story takes place in the hamlet of El Mozote where there was a bloody massacre of Christian peasants. One girl had been raped many times in the afternoon but instead of screaming and crying she sang hymns. She kept on singing even after the soldiers had done what they had done. So they shot her in the chest. She lay there with the blood flowing from her chest yet she kept singing – a bit weaker than before but still singing. The soldiers were stupefied yet they continued to mock her and laugh at her. Then they grew tired of this game and shot her again. But she continued to sing until their wonder turned to fear. So they unsheathed their

---

49 Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles : an introduction and commentary*, p 219.

50 G. Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City 1984, p 108.

machetes and hacked through her neck and at last her singing stopped. I do not know in what trance or terror the girl sang. But in the centre of her young heart was love stronger than death<sup>51</sup>. Though powerless to fight in the physical realm, yet in the spiritual realm she dealt a death blow to Satan. Her unwillingness to hate the soldiers will leave an indelible mark on them which they will never forget leading them to repentance or eternal judgment.

Is it then possible to love the people who killed Sello? Yes it is. But it will be a costly love. It will have to be a love like Jesus’.

**The Revd Craig Smith** teaches Greek and New Testament Studies at Trinity College Bristol

---

51 K. Nollis, *The Cloister Walk*. Riverhead Books, 1997, p 204. I thank Howard Peskett for this illustration.

**Broaden your horizons  
for world mission**

**Develop your skills through  
practical placements**

**Be equipped to serve  
God anywhere**

**Study with people from  
across the world**



Short Courses, CertHE, DipHE, BA Hons, MA  
For further information visit [www.redcliffe.org](http://www.redcliffe.org)  
call 01452 308097 or email [study@redcliffe.org](mailto:study@redcliffe.org)  
Courses are validated by the University of Gloucestershire



**redcliffe college**  
centre for mission training