

SATAN'S COUNTERFEIT

CHARLES C. RYRIE

President of Philadelphia College of Bible

Whenever one speaks of Satan these days, it seems increasingly necessary to preface his remarks with some word about the reality of the existence of Satan. Some Christians apparently feel that Satan merely exists in the minds of men and that our thought about his existence is the only real existence he has. In other words, Satan, they say, has no actual, objective existence in his own right. The Scriptures teach us, however, that Satan existed long before man was even created (Ezek. 28:13-15). Further, every reference by Christ to the Evil One is a proof of his real existence (cf. Matt. 13:39; 25:41; Lk. 10:18; Jn. 12:31; 16:11). Modern theology explains such references as accommodation by the Lord of His language to the customary Jewish belief, but it should be realized that such accommodation in this area in reality invalidates His entire message.

In addition, Christians sometimes forget that Satan can transform himself in a variety of ways. On the one hand he presents himself as an angel of light and his ministers are ministers of righteousness, not unrighteousness (2 Cor. 11:14-15). On the other hand, the Scriptures picture him, at least in one place, as a dragon with horns and a tail (Rev. 12:3). This is a representation of his fierce nature and of the death struggle in which he is engaged with God's people.

But whatever be the particular representation Satan makes of himself, he has a single purpose in his program. His purpose, aim, and goal is simply to counterfeit the will of God. This has been, presently is, and always will be his purpose as long as he has freedom.

Counterfeiting, too, has a single purpose. It is simply to create something as similar to the original as possible and to do it by means of some short cut. A counterfeit is similar but cheap. A counterfeit United States dollar bill, for instance, does not have a picture of Abraham Lincoln on it. This would be a sure sign that it was counterfeit. It will have Washington's picture and it will be as near to a genuine bill in as many details as possible except that there will be some short cut—either a poor engraving or cheaper paper or ink. But the point is that when you make a counterfeit you make it like the original, not unlike it.

This is the most important fact to understand about Satan's purpose in this world. If he is the master counterfeiter, then he is trying to do something that is similar to the will of God, not dissimilar. This is particularly important for Christians to grasp. Satan is intelligent enough to know that if he put something in the Christian's path, perhaps some temptation, which is obviously not the will of God, the Christian will be alert to it and resist it. But if he can offer something good which, though good in itself, is not the best, then he will more than likely have gained the advantage.

In Satan's first act of sin he boldly announced this counterfeit policy. It was expressed in five statements beginning with "I will," the last of which summarized his policy in these words: "I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:14). The important thing to notice is, of course, that Satan did not propose a plan which was to be unlike God but which was to be like Him. He intended to oppose God by counterfeit. From the very beginning this was his openly declared purpose.

Satan's first attempt to pass a counterfeit plan to man was made in the Garden of Eden. His lure was this: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1).

The emphasis was on the word every. We know this from the reply which first came to Eve's mind; namely, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." Satan's bait was to try to get Eve to think of the fact that God should give them everything. There should be no restrictions in the perfect plan of a good God. Eve's reply showed that she felt that for all practical purposes God had given them everything--"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden" "Of course, God has given us everything." Only then did it occur to her that there was one restriction; so she added, almost as an afterthought, "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3). The important point is not to question whether or not this was an addition to God's Word. This writer doubts that it was. God had very likely said this to Adam and Eve during one of their evening walks in the garden. Too, it is difficult to view "neither shall ye touch it" as an addition to God's Word because Eve must have been reporting the truth since before the fall she could not have told a lie. The important point to notice in this conversation is simply that Satan had succeeded in centering Eve's thoughts on the single restriction. This was the beginning of the end.

Actually the restriction which forbade Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit of the one tree of the knowledge of good and evil was both a major and minor one. It was a major thing simply because it was the test of their obedience or disobedience to the will of God. In contrast of our situation today in which we can sin hundreds of different ways, Adam and Eve could only sin in one way--by eating of this fruit. It was a major thing then because it involved the entire matter of their obedience to the will of God. But in another way it must have been a very minor thing. In the everyday course of their lives this single restriction played no important part. Out of all the trees in the garden of Eden, of all the variety and expansiveness of God's provision of them, to restrict one tree was relatively a very minor thing. It is not difficult to imagine that in the course of a day Adam and Eve may never have even passed by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Perhaps even in the course of weeks it did not come into their experience. In this respect it was a relatively inconsequential thing, since it was only one tree out of many. This is probably why it did not occur to Eve to mention the restriction when she first replied to the serpent. It came to her almost as an afterthought as recorded in verse 3.

What sort of a counterfeit was this? It was an attempt to counterfeit the goodness of God. If God were good, Satan was saying, He would not withhold anything from you. But since He has held back the fruit of a single tree He cannot be good. "In contrast," Satan tantalized, "my counterfeit plan allows you to do the very thing God will not permit."

Perhaps this counterfeiting approach can best be illustrated by pointing out the logic involved. This was the approach of a syllogism; that is, a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. The well-worn collegiate example of a syllogism is this: major premise--all students are poor; minor premise--I am a student; conclusion--I am poor. The syllogism underlying Satan's approach to Eve was simply this: major premise--all restrictions are evil; minor premise--God's plan is restrictive; conclusion--God's plan is evil. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" If God restricted even one tree then God's plan is evil because restrictions are evil.

Of course, the conclusion of any syllogism is only as accurate as its premise. Let us examine, therefore, Satan's premise. Restrictions are evil, he said. At one time or another and concerning some circumstance or another most of us have subscribed to this premise. Restrictions are evil. In

the minds of many students with whom I deal constantly there is not a shadow of a doubt as to the validity of this premise. Imagine, they say, asking grown, adult, mature young people to be inside a building at a certain time of night. Or why should there be deadlines on assignments and term papers? After all, what difference does it make if mine is just one day late? The teacher cannot possibly grade all of them at once. And then there is that monstrous thing called academic probation which restricts the extra-curricular participation of those students who may be on such probation. To the proposition that restrictions are evil students will readily assent. But are they? When young people grow into the responsibility of parenthood, they are quite glad to be assured that their own children will not be roaming the streets of a city any time of night. And even students realize in their sober moments that the restrictions concerning assignments and papers are necessary, otherwise they would never get them done. The restrictions of a schedule are necessary and good for all of us. Failing a course is worse than the restrictions of its requirements to pass. Being caught unprepared is worse than the restrictions of a schedule.

Are restrictions evil? No one would care to have all the traffic laws in our country suddenly rescinded. And surely we would not sleep comfortably tonight if we knew that all the restricting bars of the zoos of this country had been removed. Restrictions are evil, Satan said; God's plan is restrictive; thus God's plan is evil.

Satan is still promoting this same counterfeit today. Here are two illustrations in the spiritual realm. Our Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). This is obviously a very restricted plan of salvation. Satan's plan allows men to come to God in any way they please. In order to pass off this counterfeit he appeals to man's pride by suggesting to him that he is capable of deciding for himself and doesn't need to be told what is right or what is wrong. Restrictions are evil; God's plan of salvation is restrictive (as it is); therefore, God's plan is to be rejected and Satan's accepted.

To the young Christian Satan comes with the same counterfeit that he used in Eden. He says, "Has God given you everything as a Christian?" The immediate response is, "Certainly, yes." And then some of the things that have been gladly given up for Christ's sake come to mind, and the mind begins to dwell on them. Soon all that is seen are the few restrictions which originally were gladly given up and quickly forgotten in view of all the riches of grace in Christ. It is an easy step from "I don't do this" to "I can't do this," and an easier one to "Why can't I do this?"

So it was with Eve. She had taken Satan's bait and begun to major on the minor restriction. She was then softened up for the next phase of his attack. It is recorded in Genesis 3:4-5: "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." It goes without saying—or does it?—that Satan did not promise Eve that if she followed him her life would be shortened and she would become like the devil himself. He promised her long existence and that she would be like God.

To review: Satan's first step was to plant the idea in Eve's mind that restrictions are evil, and since God's plan for her and Adam was restrictive, God's plan was evil. His second step was to offer her the counterfeit plan; that is, his own substitute which promised no restrictions but rather that she could be like God and not die. The third step Eve took on her own. It was the step of

rationalizing the wrong thing she was about to do. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6). She began to examine the forbidden fruit and to notice all the "good" things about it. After all, she reasoned, wasn't it good for food, and doesn't God want us to eat? And shouldn't a woman want to set before her husband good food for his nourishment? Then she reflected on its beauty, and of course the same line of argument applied in this respect too. God created a lot of beauty in this world. Why should he withhold this beautiful fruit? Finally she reasoned that since wisdom is desirable (and it is), and since the fruit would make her wise, it must be desirable to eat the fruit. Gone from her mind was the central fact that God had expressly forbidden the eating of this particular fruit. Quickly forgotten was His specific command. Gone from her thought was the promise of death for disobedience. Her mind was filled only with the rationalizations--the fruit will give me physical sustenance, it will cultivate my aesthetic tastes, and it will add to my wisdom. And having pre-justified her action she ate in flagrant disobedience to the revealed will of God.

There were two important ramifications of her action. The first is stated in verse 6: she "gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." It is simply this: her sin affected someone else. And, of course, Adam's sin has affected the entire race. All sin affects others in some way or another. We do not live in a vacuum, and what we do or neglect to do affects others. Failure to maintain regular prayer time, for instance, will definitely affect those lives for whom you do not pray. Failure to persevere in the study of the Word will affect the quality of your life and testimony. All that we do or fail to do affects others in some way.

The second observation concerning this act is this: once the sin was done it could never be undone. History cannot be erased. Forgiveness can be secured, and fellowship can be restored, but history cannot be changed. This is one of the most important lessons we can ever learn about sin. I suppose every teacher has seen the reality of this many times. A student writes back years later to apologize for not paying attention in the teacher's class and he sincerely asks forgiveness. Of course, the teacher forgives, and that forgiveness is fully and sincerely given. But that forgiveness does not restore the opportunity of those classes or put notes in a blank notebook or place good grades on a poor transcript. What we do today will forever be a part of today's history tomorrow. Adam's sin has changed history, but history cannot change the fact of Adam's sin. Every human being in the world today is living proof that sin affects others and that history cannot be erased.

This makes us realize more than ever the importance of being in the will of God and not accepting Satan's counterfeit. Knowing the will of God is conditioned on three things (Rom. 12:1-2). First, there must be the complete and conclusive presentation of life. This is not salvation but dedication, and it concerns the matter of whom you will serve with the years of your life. Second, there must be separation from the world. And third, there must be that transformation which the Holy Spirit wants to effect in every believer's life. Then--and only then--can one know that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Satan's counterfeit will or God's genuine will? This is the choice. Sometimes, it becomes easier to determine God's will if consideration is given to the alternative, namely, Satan's will which will always come in the form of a counterfeit--something like the genuine article but involving some short cut. May God give to His people in these days keen discernment to see His will and zealous desire to do it.