

## The Devil's Power Is Strong Against Missions

Missionary work has been described as "the most difficult thing in the world." This is true. Missionary work has always been difficult. Frustrations are manifold in our rapidly changing and turbulent age. For example, Thailand, always considered open towards missions, is now a difficult country to enter. The Overseas Missionary Fellowship submitted 54 applications during the first six months of 1977. Of these 41 were refused and none had been granted by August.

When the Lord had commanded the Church to go and preach the gospel to all nations, He told them exactly what to expect. The gospel would be resisted and the messengers even hunted down. We tend to overlook the hard sayings of Jesus. We prefer to talk about the fantastic growth of the early church, its missionary zeal and the great number of converts added to the church. And we are rightly reminded of the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit at work in the early church. The work of the Holy Spirit explains the boldness, the passion and the persuasion with which the believers preached and witnessed; the courage with which thousands of martyrs went to their death.

Why the opposition to the gospel? The reason for persistent opposition is easy to explain. The devil! Missions without any reference to the devil and his works is like describing Second World War without mentioning Hitler. The Biblical teaching throughout is that our world is a battleground, a place in which we have to fight the evil one. When Christ came into this world, the devil felt threatened. When Christ overcame him on the cross and thus gave the death blow to the Kingdom of Darkness; the devil raged. Therefore, wherever the gospel is preached, the opposition is fierce.

How does Satan prevent the progress of the gospel? Without any hesitation, the great missionary Paul accuses Satan for disturbing the work of the Lord. He lays the blame upon the Prince of Darkness for blocking the light of the gospel. Paul said that it was Satan and not just "providential circumstances" that prevented him from visiting the church in Thesalonica as he had longed to do. "But since we were bereft of you, brethren, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you - I, Paul, again and again - but Satan hindered us." (1 Thess. 2:17f.)

How does Satan work? His supreme activity is upon the minds of men. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Tim. 4:1).

Falsehood comes from Satan. Jesus called him "a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44). The lie is the mightiest weapon he can use against the gospel of Christ. All that is false over against man or God originates in Satan. The lie is Satan's natural habitat. Christ is the king of the truth. He is Truth and Satan wants to crush the Truth. Satan is

the compelling power who propagates false teachings. (1 John 4:1) Satan is "the spirit of error." (1 John 4:6)

The Bible sees unbelief as enslavement by Satan. He has power over the souls of unbelievers. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God." (2 Cor. 4:4) But though Satan blinds, the unbeliever is still held responsible for his rejection of the gospel. He is not a helpless pawn. He is answerable for the denial of the gospel truth. "He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (John 3:18).

Every evangelist and missionary struggles with the question why some people just don't come to faith in Jesus Christ. They teach and preach with conviction and persuasion; but nothing seems to happen.

In discussions with unbelievers, Christians must be aware that as they talk a dramatic struggle is being waged with the adversary Satan for the souls of men. Only the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can liberate. The only means that helps to overcome the evil one is prayer. Christ the Mediator is triumphant already over the works of the devil.

Lord, may Thy Kingdom come with haste;  
Lay Satan's dark domain to waste;  
And rule us by Thy precious Word,  
Till everywhere Thy praise be heard.  
Let all the earth Thy name revere,  
For Thou in glory shalt appear.

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