

MICHAEL YOUSSEF

CONQUER



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*To Phil Cave
whose partnership made it possible for
untold numbers of people around the world
to be set free from Satan's clutches.*

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PART ONE



KNOW THE ENEMY

WHO IS YOUR REAL ENEMY?

Bob (not his real name) struggled with sexual sin. He had a successful ministry, his wife loved him, and hundreds of others were influenced by his ministry. But he could not resist the lustful glance, could not keep sexual fantasies out of his head.

Carnal desire had gripped him for so long that secretly he had accommodated it. Bob started to pretend it wasn't his fault. He blamed his upbringing. He blamed his psychological makeup. In effect he said, "I don't want to be like this, but what can I do? This is the way I am." Eventually he lost his position after his addiction to pornography was exposed. His ministry was ruined by his failure to overcome sin. He knew it. But he was powerless to stop himself.

At times I am overwhelmed at the number of church people who are addicted to pornography. My friend, Tal Prince, has dedicated his life to helping people who, like himself, were trapped in this modern-day slavery to sin. But that is only one area in which the enemy of our soul has succeeded in invading Christian minds and holding them captive to his powers.

There are other areas of behavior and personality over which some Christians seem to be unable to wrest control back from Satan. As a result, they live second-class lives, dogged by ineffectiveness and guilt. They go around in circles. Typically, they blame their failures

on other people or upbringing or circumstances, and they try to fight failure using psychological methods, as though sin could be solved with therapy.

Does it work? Of course not. And for one simple reason. The real *enemy* in sin is not the influence of temperament or other people. The real enemy is the devil.

The same goes for relationships. If you're married, think for a moment about that last tiff you had with your spouse. Probably you felt your partner was in the wrong and felt wounded by your partner's lack of sensitivity and care. At first, arguments like that do little damage because the hurt is more than offset by mutual love and commitment. But it may not stay that way. Have enough arguments and you will find the battle lines being drawn. You begin to anticipate conflict and to see your partner as responsible for your grievances. Sooner or later one of you begins to think, *If only I could get away from this person, my life would be so much better.*

But again, who is the *real* enemy? Whose interests are *really* served when husband and wife start to fight? Not those of the marriage partners, still less those of their children. Only one person wins when marriages break down, and that is the devil. So much hangs on a marriage: the health and security of children, management of the household, effective witnessing, your example to others. All these things Satan can seize and disrupt if he destroys a marriage. That's why marriages are under so much pressure.

Your soul and your relationships lie at the heart of a cosmic conflict. They can be won for God or lost to the devil.

Your soul and your relationships lie at the heart of a cosmic conflict. They can be won for God or lost to the devil. So get your priorities straight. Forget your niggling disagreements with the pastor;

forget the way your husband or wife fails to live up to your expectations; forget that other person in the church who constantly gets on your nerves. If you're a Christian, you're fighting the *invisible war*.

THE INVISIBLE WAR

Like all wars, the invisible war has its battlefields.

I stumbled onto such a battlefield while touring Scotland in the early nineties. It was a church in the center of a famous old university town just north of Edinburgh. Like many ancient churches in Scotland, this was an architectural masterpiece and steeped in history. The great Reformer John Knox had once graced its pulpit. Crosses on the street outside marked the sites where Christian believers had been burned at the stake for their faith. Glorious victories had been won here for the gospel. As I stepped inside, I saw a candle burning on the altar and a sparrow flitting about in the roof overhead.

"How many people worship here?" I asked my companion, who lived in the town.

He smiled sadly. "Have a guess."

"Five hundred?" I ventured. By Scottish standards the building was large.

"Try again."

"Two hundred?"

He shook his head. "Come here at eleven next Sunday and you'll see six people in the pews."

"Six?"

"Six elderly ladies. Let me tell you the story behind it."

And this is the story he told me. Twenty years ago the minister and the organist had a falling-out. Neither one can remember now what caused their disagreement. But since that time neither one has spoken a single word to the other. On Sunday morning the minister arrives early and places a list of hymns on the organ. The organist plays them, then leaves by a different door. In twenty years nobody

new has joined the church, and slowly the existing congregation has died off.

When I heard that story I was powerfully reminded of Paul's parting words to the Ephesians:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

In that Scottish church, two of the most influential believers had become enemies. But of course neither of them was the *real* enemy. They were members of the same army—the army of God—and theirs was a brawl within the platoon. And a very serious one it was. It had cost the church its membership and crippled God's mission to the unsaved. In the invisible war, that church was vital territory lost to Satan.

Never mind the beauty of the architecture. Never mind the candle or the sparrow flitting around the rafters. When I stepped through those doors, I might as well have been in Prague the day after the Soviet tanks rolled in or in Saigon the day after the Vietcong invaded. The sorry tale of broken relationships and unresolved bitterness hid a deeper, spiritual truth: the church was now in Enemy hands.

Satan dresses up his wolves as sheep,
so that experience and discernment
are needed to identify them.

It is not hard to find other examples of churches lost to the devil. Very seldom are they taken by direct attack. Satan is too clever for

that; if believers see him coming, he knows he will be repulsed. So he fights an invisible war. He proceeds by stealth. He dresses up his wolves as sheep, so that experience and discernment are needed to identify them.

Rob Bell founded Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan, in 1999. It quickly became one of America's fastest-growing churches, reaching an average weekly attendance of almost ten thousand people by 2005. However, upon the release of his 2011 book, *Love Wins*, it became apparent that this pastor who founded a "Bible church" did not hold to the teachings found in Scripture.

In *Love Wins*, Bell questions the existence of hell and the truth that only believers in Jesus Christ go to heaven. This controversy created quite a stir in the evangelical community, some immediately labeling Bell a heretic, but thousands more coming to his defense and jumping on the bandwagon of a more "tolerant" god who adapts to our culture.

Rob Bell eventually stepped down as pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, but his following has only continued to grow. He has gone on to openly affirm same-sex marriage, to the delight of many. His latest book, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, is filled with even more false teaching, but it was the first recommended title in "Oprah's Super Soulful Book of the Month" club. It appears that the more Bell waters down the gospel of Jesus Christ, the more accepted he becomes by popular culture. Unfortunately, this "more tolerant" and "less judgmental" god that Bell has created is not the God of the Bible, and is powerless to save.

No congregation is safe. Take an active, vibrant church that seeks to win the lost and equip the saints. One or two individuals come into the church and start to introduce new ideas. They say things like, "We need to move in a different direction. We need to do some social service, some counseling." Gently, and with arguments so subtle it's hard to refute them, they move the whole congregation out of the will of God. As a result, the mix of the membership

changes. The original detractors gather more detractors around them, and within a short period of time, the church has become both dead and deadly.

This is undercover work. When those wolves come in they look like sheep, they bleat like sheep, and the sheep befriend them. But the wolves are agents of the Enemy. Whether they realize it or not, they are being used to weaken the church's defenses and destroy it.

So how do we begin to win the invisible war, to keep the wolves at bay?

KNOW YOUR ENEMY!

Archie Parrish, an ex-serviceman and friend of many years, taught me a vital lesson. Archie told me of his experiences in the Korean War. "When I got there, they handed me a brochure. Every American soldier received one of these. It was titled *Know Your Enemy*."

That brochure, he said, contained everything American soldiers needed to know about the North Koreans. What were they like? How did they think? Where did they attack? What was their ultimate goal? Knowing the answers to such questions would decide whether you won or lost. Any soldier doing a tour of duty in Korea would read and reread that brochure until he could repeat it backward. Knowledge gave strategic advantage; ignorance was death.

The Enemy uses even born-again,
Spirit-filled believers as his emissaries
to destroy the work of God.

Tragically, when it comes to the invisible war, Christians are big on ignorance. Probably not one in ten believers would identify Satan as the real Enemy, much less know how to conquer him. The average Christian is oblivious to spiritual conflict. The average Christian does not possess that vital, lifesaving information on

how to overcome Satan and his demonic cohorts. Consequently, the Enemy uses even born-again, Spirit-filled believers as his emissaries to destroy the work of God.

Did you catch what I just said?

If not, read it again. *The Enemy uses believers*. That's exactly what has happened to many Christian leaders. It's exactly what happened between the minister and the organist at that old church in Scotland. And it's exactly what is happening in countless Christian marriages and other Christian relationships the length and breadth of the world. Once the devil has a foothold in your life, he will use it. You fight *in* this invisible war, but the war is also fought *in you*.

You say, "How can the Enemy get into a believer and use him to destroy God's work?" Well, the invisible war is much the same as ordinary war. A soldier in the regular army can easily serve his enemy's purposes, through cowardice, ignorance, inattention, or lack of resolve. Think what you like about the rights and wrongs of Vietnam: There is no denying that one of the reasons America lost in Vietnam was the lack of resolve and commitment on the part of the government leadership to fight to win. Half-heartedness is more serious than retreating.

Think about our lack of resolve in Iraq and where this has gotten us now.

In a similar way, surrendering your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ is not the end of the story. It is a decisive step. By acknowledging that there is no way to salvation except through Jesus, you move from darkness into light. You change your destination from hell to heaven. But you are not yet finished with your journey. You are not yet sanctified. You are like a massive corporation in the aftermath of a takeover—under new ownership, with new objectives, but with many of the old management structures still in place. Salvation takes time to soak in.

I want you to imagine it this way: In your spiritual being you are like a house with many doors. Each of those doors opens onto

your soul, and each one needs to be bolted securely to prevent illegal entry. And despite the fact that you have surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, not all of those doors are locked. If Satan comes up and gives the doors a push, sooner or later he will find one that swings open. Now he has a way into your soul. He has found your Achilles' heel.

In the Middle East, where I grew up, professional thieves don't usually break and enter. They don't *break*, that is. They go around the houses and push on the doors to see if anyone has left his door unlocked, and only then do they go in to steal and rob and destroy. Satan is a gentleman thief. He does not break and enter. If he comes into your life, it is because you have invited him, because one or two of those doors are swinging on their hinges.

This is a subject I will return to in more detail. Be aware now, though, of the number of doors you may be leaving unlocked. Anger is a door. If the door of anger is left unbolted, Satan will enter your life and create havoc in your relationships. Bitterness is a door. Hatred is a door. Lying is a door. Rebellion is a door. Envy is a door. Sexual lust is a door. Greed is a door. False guilt is a door. Shame is a door. Attraction to horoscopes and to fortune-telling and to the occult is a door. Are you understanding me? These doors, if they are not checked and bolted every day, will give the Enemy access to your soul.

The first step to conquering your
Enemy is *knowing him*.

And there is another door—the door I want to deal with first. That door is *ignorance*. For the first step to conquering your Enemy is *knowing him*. Know your Enemy. Know how to conquer him before he eats you for lunch, because that's what he wants to do. Know his operational procedure. Know what he thinks. Know when he

attacks, how he attacks, where he attacks. Give yourself to the task of intelligence gathering. Any army worth its name remains in a constant state of readiness, alert to its enemy's activities. The army that is well informed can never be overwhelmed by a surprise attack.

All this exhortation to readiness may have you worried. Is our Enemy in the invisible war so stealthy and powerful that we are in constant danger of being overrun? The answer, of course, is no. For one thing, we need to take the long view and remember that the outcome of this war is already decided. No matter how many battles the devil may win, in the end he is going to be vanquished. That means we are the only army in history to be guaranteed success before firing a single shot. Our setbacks against the devil may be painful and costly, but they do not determine the final outcome.

Therefore we should take care to build the right attitude. We are on the winning side. Victory is assured. You may be saying, "I am not afraid of the devil." And that's good. But that is not the central issue. Far more important is *whether the devil is afraid of you*. What have you done lately to scare the devil? What victory have you scored to make him run for cover?

When the great evangelist George Whitefield came to New England, a prominent and blue-blooded Bostonian minister confronted him and said, "Mr. Whitefield, I'm very sorry you came to Boston." To which the evangelist replied, "So is the devil, sir, so is the devil." Great crowds flocked to hear Whitefield, and as a result of his preaching, the boundaries of God's kingdom were significantly extended.

The devil fears his final defeat, which is
why he hates to be reminded of it.

The devil fears his final defeat, which is why he hates to be reminded of it. I was told that an eminent preacher once explained

why many Christians refuse to believe in the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. He said, “They call Genesis a myth and the Revelation a mystery.” In his opinion, no man was clever enough to come up with objections like this—they sprang from the devil himself. “And the reason the devil is so anxious to get rid of Genesis and Revelation,” he said, “is that in Genesis his sentence is declared and in Revelation it is executed.”

Let me give you some encouragement. Right now—right this very second—you have the devil on the run. How? Simply because you are taking the time and trouble to do what he most hates to see. You are getting to know your Enemy, uncovering his weaknesses, countering his strengths. For that reason, he will do his utmost to prevent you from finishing this book. And when you have finished it, he will do his utmost to make you forget what it said. So why not make the devil really mad? Go get a notepad and pen, and start writing down what the Spirit of God is teaching you.

In the chapters that follow we will look at a number of crucial and difficult areas. We will learn about the devil’s command structures and strategies, his preferred methods of attack, and his ultimate destruction. Before that, though, I want to sketch in some of the background and ask what many people consider to be the biggest question of all: Where did the devil come from?

WHERE DID THE DEVIL COME FROM?

Turn with me to two key biblical passages: Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:12-15—passages in which we find the most definitive biblical teaching on the origin of Satan.

In these passages neither Ezekiel nor Isaiah addressed Satan directly. Instead their taunts were directed against contemporary leaders whose opposition to God made them types of Satan. God instructed Ezekiel: “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre” (Ezekiel 28:12). Similarly, Isaiah was told: “you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 14:4).

All the enemies of God in the Old Testament were types of Satan, including the pharaoh confronted by Moses. And wherever these types are found, we can be sure the Bible is teaching us something important about the devil. Even today any king, any prince, any president, or any ruler who refuses or rejects God, acts in effect as Satan's personal representative. Any government that rejects God becomes the seat of Satan. Why? Because Satan uses people to accomplish his purpose. Satan always employs willing agents to do his evil bidding.

The first clue to Satan's origins is found in Isaiah's use of the name *Lucifer*:

“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!”

(Isaiah 14:12 NKJV)

At first this seems paradoxical. The name Lucifer literally means “light-bearer, the brilliant one, the shining one.” Ezekiel affirmed this same truth by picturing Satan dressed in a sort of glitter-suit of precious stones. God said of him:

“You were the signet of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering,
sardius, topaz, and diamond,
beryl, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;
and crafted in gold were your settings
and your engravings.
On the day that you were created
they were prepared.”

(Ezekiel 28:12-13)

In contrast to Ezekiel, Paul later described the Ephesians' struggle against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). How can Satan's realm of darkness be presided over by one who was called the bearer of light?

Remember, we are talking about *origins* here. God created Lucifer to be one of his principal servants. Read further in Ezekiel:

"You were an anointed guardian cherub.

I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;
in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.

You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you."

(Ezekiel 28:14-15)

According to Ezekiel, Satan was "the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." Even so, Lucifer's light was the light of a mirror, not that of a torch. The light never originated within him. Not one of those precious stones described in Ezekiel 28 could shine by itself; put it in a dark room and you wouldn't even see it. Lucifer shone because he *reflected* the beauty and light of God.

Don't forget that Lucifer was one of the most senior angels. He worked at the highest level. Unlike Moses, who had to cover his face in the presence of God, Lucifer was able to look at God's very throne. He was able to voice praise, to voice adoration, to voice worship to God. Such was his privilege and the authority he had from on high.

This is what makes Satan such a cunning and dangerous adversary. He is like a top-ranking defector from the CIA who knows the protocols and the secret codes, who can pick up his old contacts and be absolutely convincing. For this reason Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same

terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:12-14).

Satan knows exactly how to look like an angel of light, because that is what he was.

Satan knows exactly how to look like an angel of light, because that is what he was. That is what God created him to be: Lucifer. Not because he had any beauty of his own, but because he would so magnificently reflect the beauty and glory of his Creator. And don't miss what Paul wrote about those false apostles "disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." The wolves take after their leader; they are masters of disguise. In a later chapter I will return to this problem and show how effectively, even now, Satan's cohorts are being sent to masquerade as true believers.

Pride Came Before the Fall

But let's look at a second clue to Satan's origins. He was created by the one true eternal God, who has no beginning and no end. As a created being Satan was obliged to offer worship, to offer praise, to adore the Creator God. He was perfect in every way. He was the epitome of wisdom. He was the ultimate in beauty. But he was created for a purpose. God delegated to him full executive responsibility for the angelic hosts who serve him throughout the universe.

The Bible does not tell us how many there are in this host. *Zillions*, today's kids would say. But even zillions seems an underestimate. And within this heavenly host, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:21, there are numerous ranks, classes, and grades ("rule and authority and power and dominion"). Each rank or class or grade has a different responsibility. Each has a different area of ministry. Each has a sphere of work that is different from the others. Read Revelation

and you will find that the job of some angels is to stand constantly before the throne of God, saying,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”
(Revelation 4:8)

The only thing the Bible says of *all* angels—in Hebrews 1:14—is that they are “ministering spirits.”

It seems that Lucifer presided over this entire group. He was the executive VP. And this position brought him awesome power. He acted as top intermediary, chief middleman. He gathered worship from every part of creation and brought it into the presence of God. But being a middleman, even chief middleman, isn’t easy. It requires supernatural humility and supernatural maturity.

For Lucifer to entertain the ambition of replacing
God was not only blasphemous but irrational.

Ask any top executive. Sure, you know how far you have risen and how many people are down there below you. But the closer you get to the top, the more intensely you desire to climb that final rung and become the undisputed head. In corporate life, perhaps, this is not such an unreasonable ambition; the move from executive VP to CEO is not such a large one. But an unbridgeable gulf separates creature from Creator; consequently, for Lucifer to entertain the ambition of replacing God was not only blasphemous but irrational.

Isaiah gives us insight into Lucifer’s thought processes at this point:

“You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;

I will sit on the mount of assembly
 in the far reaches of the north;
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
 I will make myself like the Most High.”
 (Isaiah 14:13-14)

See the verbs by which Lucifer expressed his ambition:

- I will ascend...
- I will set my throne on high...
- I will sit...
- I will ascend above...
- I will make myself like...

Five times in two verses the same words appear: *I will*. God created Lucifer perfect, but he also created him with the capacity to choose—just as he did Adam and Eve. To have the power of choice is to be, in a special way, aware of yourself as the chooser. It opens the possibility of becoming so focused on yourself that you forget how insignificant you really are.

Holding up your hand in front of your face, you believe your hand to be larger than a mountain on the horizon. You begin to equate yourself with God. And from this fatal perceptual error springs all kinds of evil: self-focus, pride, and false ambition.

Lucifer failed to recognize that everything
 he possessed was a gift from God, and
 that without God he was nothing.

This is what happened to Lucifer. He became proud of his beauty. He became proud of his intellect. He became proud of his capacity. He became proud of his attainment. He failed to recognize that everything he possessed was a gift from God, and that without God

he was nothing. He really thought he deserved worship in his own right. Ezekiel put it well when he, speaking on behalf of the Lord, said to Satan,

“Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your
splendor.”

(Ezekiel 28:17)

And that is why God fired him and threw him out of heaven. Jesus referred to this event when he said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Here is Ezekiel’s version:

“In the abundance of your trade
you were filled with violence in your midst, and
you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub,
from the midst of the stones of fire.
Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your
splendor.

I cast you to the ground;
I exposed you before kings,
to feast their eyes on you.”

(Ezekiel 28:16-17)

THREE QUESTIONS AND A WARNING

At this point some Christians find fault with God. Didn’t God know from the beginning, they ask, that pride would capture the heart of Lucifer? The answer is yes because God is omniscient, and being omniscient means you know everything ahead of time. So, could God not have prevented Satan’s fall? Again the answer is yes because God is also omnipotent. He can do anything. And here comes the third question. If God knew Lucifer would rebel, and if God could have prevented it, why didn’t he do so?

Well, why didn't he? On the face of it, preventing Satan's rebellion would have saved an awful lot of trouble. There would have been no fall in Eden, no history of human sin, no need for redemption, no destruction of the present order to make way for the new heavens and new earth.

The closest we can get to answering this question is to point to the importance of free will. Without free will, after all, created beings are only machines. Like computers, they do exactly what they are told to do—no more, no less. It could be argued that we are real persons at all only to the extent that we are free—free even to reject God. Here, though, we are moving out of the circle of biblical certainty and into the realm of speculation.

At this point there is a far more pressing issue to consider. If you forget everything else I've said so far, don't forget what I'm going to say now.

Lucifer's sin has been reproduced again and again throughout history. It was reproduced in Adam and Eve when they believed the serpent's lie and wanted to be like God. It was reproduced when the people of Israel arrived in the Promised Land, only to turn their backs on God and worship Baal. It was reproduced again when the proud Pharisees refused to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the real light of God, the only anointed Messiah, and the only Savior. It is repeated every single day when an unsaved person refuses to submit to the authority of God's Son. Lucifer's sin is reproduced again and again. For the unsaved do not want to acknowledge that they cannot know God by their own minds, that they cannot reach God by their good works, that they cannot be saved their own way.

But worse than that, Satan's sin is also being reproduced among believers. This is why the apostle Paul warned Timothy not to let an immature Christian assume a position of leadership. This is not reverse ageism. Paul was not talking about chronological maturity but spiritual maturity. How many Christian leaders have we seen in America in the last twenty years who have been disgraced through

their immaturity? Such a person, said Paul, should be kept from leadership responsibility “or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6).

So be warned, whoever you are, you are never closer to Satan, or more clearly under his control, than when pride drives you.

So be warned, whoever you are—man or woman, clergy or layperson, old or young—you are never closer to Satan, or more clearly under his control, than when pride drives you. Pride distorts your judgment. It makes you covet things you have no right to. It alienates you from God. No temptation confronts us more persistently or entices us more subtly than the temptation of pride, because through pride Satan reproduces himself. So let no one “think of himself more highly than he ought” (Romans 12:3)—for to do so is to think as the Enemy thinks.

As you learn about the Enemy, examine yourself for traces of pride—pride of knowledge, pride of achievement, pride of position, pride of possession, even pride in your cleverness at thwarting Satan. Whatever form it takes, pride will always bring you to the doors of the recruiting office where the devil turns sheep into wolves.

Don't let it happen to you.