

Satan The Great

1 Peter 5:6-9

Keeping a lion as a pet is never a good idea. Just ask 56-year-old Italian attorney Sergio Montella—that is, if you can find him. He lived in southern Italy and kept a lion, a panther, and several cats and dogs in the basement of his home. When neighbors hadn't seen Montella in a week, they called police, who found his mauled remains in the lion's cage.

Or you go to Hardin County, Illinois, and ask Al Abell's widow. She arrived home just before six o'clock one day to find their African pet lion out of its cage, with her husband nowhere in sight. She called deputies, who killed the lion, then found the fatally injured body of her husband nearby.

No, lions are not good pets. A lion is a powerful animal, the proverbial "king of the beasts." The Bible says that the lion is "*mightiest among beasts*" (Proverbs 30:30). We are told that a large male grows to a length of about ten feet, and weighs between 400 and 500 pounds. The lion will stalk its prey patiently, and then when the time is exactly right, will leap at the head of its victim, placing one paw over the face, and one on the shoulder, before going for the kill by biting into the victim's neck.

No wonder Peter compared Satan to the lion, because Satan stalks his prey in much the same way: very patiently, very silently, and then at just the right moment, very quickly.

And you and I are the prey.

From the Scriptures we can learn much about our enemy. We can learn how he attacks, how he stalks, and how he works for every opportunity to tear apart and destroy what belongs to God, or what would potentially belong to God. He does everything in his power to keep us from doing what God wants us to do.

Satan is great! He is not great in the sense of wonderful, but in the sense of large, or in the sense of influence. Looking at the Scriptures, and studying the lion from the animal world, we are able to see three things about Satan, the Great.

1 Satan is the Great Divider

Just as a group of fish is called a school, and a group of sheep is called a flock, and a group of cattle is called a herd, so a group of lions is called a “pride.” Sometimes the lion will hunt for his food alone, but at other times he will hunt with other lions in a pride.

Our Creator has built hunting strategies and instinct into this mighty animal. Certain lions will sit patiently in the grass while the remaining lions creep around to the other side of their victims, working their way very slowly towards their victim. What they are trying to do is to frighten one animal into running away, and when that one animal runs, it discovers too late that it has run into ambush! The lions waiting in the grass suddenly leap up, and it’s over in a matter of seconds.

The key to the success of the hunt is to separate one of the animals from the others.

Experts tell us that in the countries where lions are plentiful and roam freely that men will drive huge timbers into the ground to form an enclosure, and then they will herd their cattle into the enclosure for the night. The lions cannot get in, and they don’t even try. So here’s what they do: the pride of lions will surround the enclosure, and then in the silence of the night, one of the lions will sound a deafening roar. The lion on the opposite side will respond with another roar.

Soon all the lions are roaring outside the enclosure, until the cattle on the inside are so frightened and terrified that they begin to jostle and push and shove each other in their terror. It is not long until they begin to push against the timbers, and before too much longer a breach is made in the enclosure. One of the cattle will jump out and will begin running away from the lions. But that is all the lions have been waiting for, and the fleeing cattle don’t stand a chance.

The lions are successful in dividing the animals, and that was the key to the success of the hunt.

Satan works in the same way. He delights in dividing the church and the people of God. He may not do anything but sit outside and make a lot of noise, but before too long we begin listening to that terrifying roar of Satan rather than to the tender voice of God. We begin to push and shove one another. We begin to argue and criticize and gossip. We demand to get our own way, and we loudly declare that everyone else is wrong.

Who cares if sometime in all the confusion, a younger or weaker Christian decides he's had enough? Who cares if that lost person, so close to accepting Christ, sees the children of God bickering, and decides not to come back? Who cares if a breach is made in the protective will of God, and one of those souls jumps out, right into the arms of Satan?

He uses hatred among God's people and in God's church to divide Christians from one another. He knows that we are strongest when we are united. He will use laziness, particularly on Sunday mornings and evenings, to keep God's people from being at God's House to study God's Word and fellowship with God's people.

He will use pride, and anger, and a contentious spirit, and a critical spirit, and a lust for power. He will do everything possible to tear the church of God apart and to divide us. He knows that we are not likely to *work* together if we will not *worship* together. And sometimes Satan will use the kinds of things we don't recognize as coming from him—misunderstandings, hurt feelings, jealousy, and pettiness.

I remember as a teenager, shooting basketball in my backyard, when one of the younger kids in the neighborhood walked up. He began to tell me that he was mad at the girl who lived across the street from me. When I asked why, he said, "Well, she took my best stick, and she won't give it back to me."

That is pretty petty, but on a different level you and I are just as childish and petty in our relationships with other people, particularly other Christians. And Satan is the cause of it, and he uses our own faults and unsundered lives to achieve his goal of dividing us.

At other times, Satan is merely content to divide you with yourself, or to divide you from God—or at least make you think you are. He delights in causing us to doubt, in giving us feelings of insecurity, or in dividing our allegiances. He wants to make us believe that we can love God, and yet love the world, which is totally contrary to what Scripture teaches. He'll do everything he can to divide those who belong to God, or those who are close to committing their lives to Jesus. He is the Great Divider.

2 Satan is the Great Diversionist.

You know what a diversion is. We've seen shows on television where someone being pursued threw a rock into the bushes to create a diversion, to make the person chasing him think that he is in a different spot.

Satan “throws rocks” at us or around us, so to speak, in an attempt to take our minds off our goals and objectives and purpose for even being here, to divert our attention to things of much less significance. Jesus says, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every living creature,*” and Satan distracts us into thinking that what Jesus actually said was “Come ye out of all the community into our church and hear the gospel preached.”

Jesus says that we are to minister to the sick and feed the hungry, and Satan creates a diversion so that somehow we never get around to doing those things. He might use our jobs or our families or even a church activity to keep us from focusing on those things God would have us do.

We are like the house wreckers in Alexandria, Louisiana, who found out too late that they were demolishing the wrong house. All of the front porch had been removed, and the entire upstairs of the two-story house had been leveled, when the owner of the house just happened to drive by. He ran up to the workers and screamed, “What are you doing?” The foreman called his office and found out they should have been two blocks farther down the street.

Sometimes Satan causes us Christians to “tear down the wrong house,” by getting us to criticize our brothers and sisters in Christ, rather than working together to fight Satan and advance the Kingdom of God. Sometimes Satan creates a diversion of laziness, or sickness, or some past disagreement, to keep us from doing the work of God.

Sometimes he’ll use rain. It has been said that it takes a whole tank full of water to get a Baptist into church, but only eight drops of rain to keep him home.

Sometimes he’ll use good weather, making us think that we might as well enjoy it while it is here, and we’ll do that good deed tomorrow.

There is an old legend about the devil wanting to destroy the church, so he called all his officers together for a planning meeting. Lieutenant Anger volunteered for the job, saying to Satan, “I’ll do it. I’ll make them mad at one another.”

Greed spoke up next. “Let me do it,” he said. “Leave it to me to make them devour themselves emotionally.” Then Jealousy said, “Satan, I will destroy them through suspicion and distrust.” Despair said he would ruin them through pessimism, by getting them to believe that there is no hope, that everything and everybody is bad.

As Satan pondered these options, in walked Procrastination. He was late for the meeting! He heard what was being said, and shook his head. “Satan, if you want a thorough job done, leave it to me. I’ll tell them that they can do it, that their God will help them to be successful, that their future is golden, that nothing can stop them.”

Satan said, “How will that help destroy the church?” to which Procrastination replied, “I’ll tell them they can begin tomorrow!”

Satan will often try to divert us by getting us to choose what is good over what is best. He doesn’t mind if we are “busy” at church as long as we do not do the things God wants us to do. He’ll do whatever he can to make absolutely sure that you and I are distracted from doing the work of God and obeying Christ.

He’ll do everything in his power to keep a person from being saved. And if you get saved, he will try to keep you from being baptized. If you get baptized, he will try to keep you out of Sunday School. If you go to Sunday School, he will try to get you to go home before the worship service begins. If you stay for the worship service, he will try to keep you from praying and singing.

If you pray and sing during worship, he will try to keep you from hearing the sermon. If you hear the sermon, he will help you find some fault with it. If you agree with the preacher, Satan will try to keep you from practicing your Christianity. If you start getting involved in the Lord’s work, Satan will try to keep you from enjoying it. If you enjoy your work, he will try to keep you away from Bible Study. And if you study the Bible, he will try to keep you from sharing it with others.

He never stops working on us as Christians, and he continuously is seeking to divert us from the task set before us. Satan is the Great Diversionist.

3 Satan is the Great Deceiver

Satan is known in Scripture as “the father of lies,” and as the “father of falsehood.” His methods have not changed since. He still will lie to you, he still will deceive you into thinking that he knows best—or that **you** do!—that what is wrong is really right, and God is the one who is lying when He promises to give eternal life and to give life more abundantly. He’ll deceive you into thinking that you are having such a good time while you’re wallowing in the filth of your own sin that you couldn’t possibly wish to repent and turn your life over to Christ.

That is the way Satan works. And he is most effective when we don't realize that he is the one behind that attitude, that philosophy, that lifestyle, that habit, that way of thinking, that activity.

So it is no wonder that many times in Scripture the believer is told to "*be not deceived.*" Satan would have us believe that we can associate with whomever we wish, and our morals and our testimony will not be affected, that we can hang out with the crowd that drinks, uses drugs, cheats, steals, and commits all kinds of moral sin, and not be affected. But Scripture says, "*Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals*" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Satan would deceive us by getting us to listen to vain philosophies and the godless ideas of so-called "intelligent" men and women, but the Bible says, "*Let no one deceive you with empty words*" (Ephesians 5:6).

Satan would deceive us into believing that it doesn't really matter whether we sin or not. Just a little sin here and there won't hurt! But the Bible says, "*Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap*" (Galatians 6:7).

Satan would deceive us by whispering in our ears that no one is really bad enough to be sent to hell, that this person or that person is really good, and even if he doesn't know Christ, and even if he does occasionally sin, he's really not all that bad. This is especially the way we look at our friends and family. But God says, "*Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as He is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning*" (1 John 3:7-8).

You see, as with most other things, Satan has turned this whole idea of salvation upside down. He's got us thinking that God "sends" people to hell. That's why we hear people saying, "My God is too loving to send anybody to hell."

But that's only a *partial* truth, and *partial* truth is *totally* wrong. Yes, God is loving, but that's not the whole story. Listen! That is a distortion of truth. It's a deception—and where does deception come from? Where do lies come from? We are sinners, and sinners go to hell. That's where we're going *anyway*—God doesn't have to "send" *anyone* there. God in His grace and loving plan has made it possible so that we sinners can be forgiven of our sin and spend eternity with Him in heaven. He has made it possible through the blood of Christ and His death on the cross for the penalty for our sins to be paid for.

Satan will flatter you by making all kinds of promises to you, just as he did to Eve in the Garden of Eden. There's an old children's nursery song called "*The Frog and the Crow*," which tells the story of the jolly fat frog who is enticed by a crow to come out of his home. The crow promises the frog that "There is sweet music on yonder green hill," and "you shall be a dancer in yellow."

When next you hear the frog speaking, he is asking some very plaintive questions: "But where is the sweet music on yonder green hill—where are the dancers in yellow?" And then the tale ends when the crow eats the frog.

That is exactly the way Satan works, by making many promises and then when we have strayed too far, devouring our very souls.

Al Wilson was born in 1939 in Meridian, Mississippi, and began his singing career when he was only 12. In 1968 he recorded a hit song entitled "*The Snake*":

*On her way to work one mornin', down a path alongside the lake,
A tender-hearted woman saw a poor half-frozen snake.
His pretty colored skin had been all frosted with the dew,
"Poor thing," she cried, "I'll take you in, and I'll take care of you."
"Take me in, tender woman,
Take me in, for heaven's sake,
Take me in, tender woman,"
Sighed the snake.*

*She wrapped him up all cozy, in a comforter of silk.
And laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk.
Well she hurried home from work that night and soon as she arrived,
She found that pretty snake she'd taken in had been revived.
"Take me in, tender woman,
Take me in, for heaven's sake,
Take me in, tender woman,"
Sighed the snake.*

*Now, she clutched him to her bosom. "You're so beautiful," she cried.
"But if I hadn't brought you in, by now you might have died."
Now she stroked his pretty skin again, and then kissed and held him tight.
But instead of saying, "Thanks," that snake gave her a vicious bite.
"Take me in, tender woman,*

*Take me in, for heaven's sake,
Take me in, tender woman,"
Sighed the snake.*

*"But, I saved you," cried that woman, "And you've bitten me, but why?
And you know your bite is poisonous, and now I'm gonna die."*

"Aw, shut up, silly woman," said that reptile, with a grin.

"You knew very well I was a snake before you brought me in."

"Take me in, oh, tender woman,

Take me in, for heaven's sake,

Take me in, tender woman,"

Sighed the snake.

(Words by Oscar Brown, Jr.)

Mica Craig stopped by his local WalMart store in Clarkston, Washington, recently (May 2012) to pick up some mulch. He was in the parking lot garden center, when he stopped to pick up a stick—but what appeared to be a stick was actually a rattlesnake, and it bit him! Sometimes Satan will deceive us by making us think—or even vehemently argue—that there is nothing wrong with this or that. But ask yourself this: if there's nothing wrong with it, why do I have to defend it?

Satan is the Great Divider, the Great Diversionist, and the Great Deceiver. He is much more powerful than any of us here alone. The only hope for any of us is Jesus Christ! He said, *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free"* (John 8:32). Because of Jesus, we do not have to be divided, or distracted, or deceived. And we will not be, as long as we remain close to Jesus, and follow the words of Peter, *"Be sober, and be vigilant, and watchful. For our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring, hungry lion, looking for someone to devour."*

And he is looking for you...