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### Liar, Liar: The Devil's Strategy of Deception and Slander

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# LIAR, LIAR

*The devil's strategy  
of deception and slander*

JOHN PECKHAM

The governor faced serious accusations of corruption. He was innocent, but many of his constituents did not know what to believe. The accusations included rumors of infidelity toward his wife. This upset him more because of how it affected his wife than how it affected his position as governor. If his wife believed such allegations, their relationship would be profoundly damaged.

How could he clear his name and restore the relationships? Imagine he chose to imprison his accusers until they withdrew the charges against him. Would that help? No. It would be *entirely* counterproductive, only making things worse—far worse!

Might the governor exercise his power in some other way to clear his name? No. Innocent though he may be, the more of his executive power he would use against his accusers, the more likely his constituents would think he was corrupt. Slanderous allegations against one's name cannot be defeated by force or power. The only way to defeat such allegations? Show them to be false by demonstration.

In our world God's name has been dragged through the mud. This is no accident. This is the enemy's strategy in the cosmic conflict, and has been throughout the ages.







The serpent started with what might seem like an innocent question. But the question stated nearly the exact opposite of what God had commanded.

### SLANDER IN THE GARDEN

Genesis 1 and 2 tell of God's creation of the world, *all* of which was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). But in Genesis 3 everything changes.

The story there begins, "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1). The Hebrew word for "cunning" or "crafty" is ambivalent—used of both good and evil agents throughout the Bible. If you were hearing this story for the first time, you might not yet know whether the serpent was good or evil.

This "crafty" serpent "said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (verse 1). The serpent started with what might seem like an innocent question. But the question stated nearly the exact opposite of what God had commanded. God told Adam and Eve they could eat from *every* tree except for one (Gen. 2:16, 17). It wasn't really a hard commandment, by the way. It was not as if God had said they could eat from only one tree. Only one tree was off-limits.

Accordingly, Eve responded, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Gen. 3:2, 3).

"You will not surely die," the serpent replied (Gen. 3:4). Here this "crafty" serpent effectively claimed that God was a liar.

At this juncture *someone* must have lied to Eve. She had a choice to make. Either God had lied or the serpent was now lying to her, but someone was a liar. Whom would Eve believe?

The serpent didn't merely allege that God was a liar, however. He also planted a motive: "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The serpent effectively claimed, "God is lying to you because He wants to oppress you. He doesn't want what is best for you. He wants to keep you in the dark."

The serpent's allegations are deeply slanderous, painting a portrait of God that is the exact opposite of God's character of unselfish love.

### THE FATHER OF LIES

Revelation identifies this serpent as the devil, calling him "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). Jesus Himself teaches about this archdeceiver: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Notably, the Greek word translated "devil" (*diabolos*) means "slanderer," one who brings "charges with hostile intent"<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, when Ezekiel 28 introduces the fall of the angel who became the devil, it refers to his activity with a term that literally refers to slander (verse 5).<sup>2</sup> Satan is the slanderer from the beginning—the father of slander and archslanderer. From the very beginning until now and beyond, the serpent continues to slander God's name in the cosmic conflict.

In direct contrast to Satan's disinformation campaign, Jesus proclaimed of His own mission: "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). Notice the reason He came: to witness or testify to the truth. And He called His disciples to be witnesses to the truth (a major theme of Scripture).

Truth matters far more than most people think.

But some do not believe Christ precisely because He testifies of the truth. Indeed, just after identifying the devil as the father of lies in John 8, Jesus added, "But because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me. . . . And if I tell you the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (verses 45, 46). We must be very careful not to believe simply what we want to believe. We might find ourselves rejecting God's truth.

#### **CHERISHING TRUTH IN A POST-TRUTH AGE**

We live in an age that has often been called the information age. But with the lies and deception that fly around in social media and beyond, ours might as well be called the disinformation age. We live in a new Babylon—in the sense of confusion.

In my office I have the following text hanging, which I continually try to follow: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). It is not that I or you can be saved by knowledge. We cannot. But the truth nevertheless matters a great deal. We are to be ready to give reasons for our faith (1 Peter 3:15) and to thwart the fiery arrows of the devil (Eph. 6:16), knowing that many arrows in the devil's arsenal aim at undermining the truth about God—especially God's character of perfect justice and love.

Again, that God's name has been dragged through the mud is no accident. It is the enemy's strategy. He is the archdeceiver and the archslander that seeks to displace God by causing creatures to think God is a tyrant. His war against God is a war of disinformation. But even as a governor could not clear his name by force or a display of power, allegations against God's character cannot be defeated by the exercise of power, but only by a demonstration of God's character of perfect, unselfish love.

Even if Satan were removed from the picture, without a demonstration of God's character the doubts and distrust sown by Satan's allegations would persistently unravel the harmony of the universe. This is because love depends on trust, and if creatures do not trust God fully, love is undermined, and with it the very foundation of the harmony of the universe. God, then, demonstrates His character not for His own sake, but for ours, for without such demonstration the greatest good for all humans, love relationship with God, would be undermined.

The only way for God to root out evil once and for all is by a demonstration of His character of love that is sufficient to answer all questions for all time—showing the devil's allegations to be utterly false. This He does at the greatest cost to Himself, through (among other things) Christ's giving His own life for us on the cross—the ultimate display of love.

In what some have referred to as a post-truth age, truth matters perhaps more than ever before. Christ came not only to (among other things) "bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37) but also to commission His followers to be witnesses. How much, then, should we devote to searching for truth, particularly to know God as deeply as possible, discerning truth from falsehood, and spreading the truth about God's love far and wide—not only in words but also in deeds?

Would you follow Christ? May we take up the high calling of seeking and knowing the truth and lovingly standing as one of Christ's witnesses in an age of disinformation.

"This is eternal life," Jesus said to the Father, "that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). How might you help someone else know Him today? ♣

<sup>1</sup> H. Bietenhard, "Satan, Beelzebul, Devil, Exorcism," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), vol. 3, p. 468.

<sup>2</sup> The term, *rekullah*, is typically translated "trading" in this verse, but the verb more specifically "signifies going from person to person dealing in goods or in gossip." Richard M. Davidson, "And There Was Gossip in Heaven," *Adventist Review*, Jan. 24, 2013, p. 23, [www.adventistreview.org/2013-1503-22](http://www.adventistreview.org/2013-1503-22).

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