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The devil accused in the wrong!

It is the desire of all true ministers of the gospel to see God's people walk in the paths of truth.

Nothing is more readily understood by the true under shepherd than that the devil, the 'master of lies and deception' is ever seeking to mislead the flock of God.

It does not take much to get us off the right path. Just one word of God's truth substituted by the devil's lie is enough!

In this article I seek to address the false notion that the coronavirus is the work of the devil and not the Lord.

I need not explain just how misleading that would be if it is embraced by Christians!

Here are some Scriptures which deal with the matter of the Lord smiting nations and men with plagues!

"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw," Matthew 12:22.

The devil is the author of much evil but there are evils of which he is accused but of which he is not guilty.

I remember, just after I started as a student, I was driving Dr Paisley to a conference in Coleraine Free Presbyterian Church. This was in 1965.

As always, we were in a rush. We were nearing Coleraine and I overtook a car where really I shouldn't. I just was able to get past it and on to my own side again as I entered a corner. I had hardly completed the manoeuvre when I met a car coming toward me. I knew that it had been a 'near miss' and felt somewhat ashamed.

A short time later, a police siren from behind us indicated that I had to pull over. The car that I had narrowly missed had been a police car! Dr Paisley got out and had a few words with the policeman, and being well known and well regarded by the police force back then, the matter was taken no further.

When he got back into the car I, shamefacedly, exclaimed, 'The old devil always causes trouble!'

Dr Paisley, somewhat sternly, responded: 'It was nothing to do with the devil. It was your bad driving!'

I was suitably humbled and ashamed and I learned a lesson I have never forgotten.

We are quick to blame the devil for that for which we alone are to blame! I don't think we owe the devil an apology for though it was my foolish and risky driving, I am sure he played a part in suggesting to me that I was a good enough driver to get past the car and then played a part in my seeking to cover up my folly!

However, I did need to apologise to the Lord for seeking to avoid owning up to my sin and attempting to cover my guilt.

Virus

There is a measure of likeness seen between my folly and the error of blaming the devil for today's pandemic. To blame the devil would be to utterly miss the vital issue of it all.

It is the Lord and not the devil who is at work in this Covid-19 plague!

It is to the Bible we must turn for instruction on the matter.

1. UNDOUBTEDLY THE DEVIL IS A SOURCE OF DISEASE AND SUFFERING.



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Perhaps the best known instance of his inflicting a human being with a disease is the case of Job.

"And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown," Job 2:4-7.

There are three points that we need to observe in this event.

1. The devil had a desire to afflict Job with boils but could not do so until the Lord granted him permission.
2. He was able only to inflict boils upon Job. I have no doubt that there were many of God's saints in that day whom the devil hated and would have loved to have visited with physical pain and suffering but his malignancy was limited to Job alone by divine decree.
3. The death he inflicted upon Job's children in his earlier attack displayed what he would have loved to do to Job but he could not. He was under God's restraint. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand," Job 1:12.

Limited

What a comfort it is to realise the curtailments the Lord has placed upon the devil! Yes, he today "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (swallow)," 1Peter 5:8, but even in this, he is under God's restraint.

It was by this grace Paul was able to write: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion," 2 Timothy 4:17.

The 'lion' in this instance was the animal the Romans used to torture and execute, for their own entertainment, those they deemed worthy of death, including many of God's saints.

Yes, the devil is the afflicter of God's people and indeed, mankind generally, but there is a limit set upon his malevolent intentions.

We have a number of incidents in the New Testament that illustrate this.

"As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel," Matthew 9:32-33.

"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw," Matthew 12:22.

"And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" Luke 13:11-16.

Here we have occurrences of suffering foisted upon individuals by the devil.



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2. IN THE BIBLE, IT IS THE LORD ALONE WHO INFLICTS NATIONS WITH PLAGUES.

This is seen in the case of Pharaoh and the Egyptian nation.

"Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall lothe to drink of the water of the river." Exodus 7:17-18. Jehovah demonstrated the power that belonged to Him alone in this the first of ten plagues upon that wicked nation.

It is true that verse 22 of that chapter states: "And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said."

This was a deception that the Lord permitted these devil-inspired and empowered magicians to perform and that in order to advance His purpose and will. The outcome of this 'trick' for that is what it was, is seen in the words: "And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said."

What is to be noticed is that the magicians DID NOT turn the blood back into water!! That they were unable to do.

His Own

The Lord has been known to strike the nation of His own people with pestilence in order to chastise them for their sin.

"And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still." Numbers 14:36-38.

"And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men," 2Samuel 24:10-15.

Wonderful Words

Surely we all remember the wonderful words of 2 Chronicles 7:12-14. "And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

3. THE LORD'S POWER TO INFICT NATIONS WILL BE EVIDENT AGAIN.

I say 'will be' but perhaps I should have said 'is' evident once more!

The present coronavirus is, I believe, something that has come from the hand of the Lord upon nations in



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rebellion against Him and His Word.

Our own nation has flaunted centuries of gospel privileges and in the last 100 years has stubbornly and resolutely set its face toward idolatry and anti-Christian religions. The main denominations, born out of times of Reformation and Revival, have cast away God's truth and embraced, with a vengeance, the devil's lie.

What was predicted in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, is fulfilled before our eyes. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

Peter also warned us of the days we are now passing through. "That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2Peter 3:2-4.

Never was less thought of the Word of God and its revelation regarding the return of Christ in power and great glory, than it is today. The spirit that has prevailed for generations now in the United Kingdom is that seen in the palace of Belshazzar as is recorded in Daniel 5:3-4.

"Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." That spirit is nightly seen amongst those who rejoice to defy the Coronavirus restrictions and in so doing shake their fists in the face of God.

Future

There is approaching, and that very soon, even greater manifestations of God's anger against nations. This is revealed to us in the Book of the Revelation. Heaven announces, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the last trump, these words. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth," Revelation 11:15-18.

Note the fact that at the time of God's judgments upon the earth, just prior to the Saviour's return to take unto Himself the "kingdoms of this world", the nations are in open rebellion and 'angry' with God!

In Chapter 16, events antecedent to the blowing of the seventh trumpet are recorded for us. Here we see the angry defiance of the nations.

"And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds," Revelation 16:8-11.

The madness we see on our streets amongst a few will spread and intensify until the general disposition of the nations, in the territories of the Antichrist in particular, will be one of a demented lunacy in the face of



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the very obvious anger of God. They will be seen to gnaw their tongues for pain, and blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repent not of their deeds.

No, the Coronavirus is not the work of the devil but I put it to you that it is the portent of greater judgments upon men for their defiance of God and His Son!

The Question For Today

What are we to do? That is the question for which we must earnestly seek and answer.

Again, we must resort to the Bible and not our own speculations.

'What saith the Scriptures?' Following the revelation of God's wrath upon nations and man's angry and stubborn and vain reaction as we have already set forth in the above verses, there then follows this verse.

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame," Revelation 16:15.

This a verse for the believer!

It tells us:

1. The one watching for Christ is blessed. When the people of God are in revival, they are very conscious of the return of Christ. They live in the light of that day.

"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body," Romans 8:23.

"Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1:6-8.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ," 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

These verses all indicate the spirit of watchfulness there was amongst the early Church. Has ever the Church been more full of the Spirit of Grace and Power than in those days? And has it ever been more watchful for Christ's return? The two spiritual characteristics go together.

In the days before the return of Christ, I believe the Church, presently careless and slumbering, will be aroused to a state of watchfulness and it becomes wonderfully aware of the nearness of Christ's return.

So it was at His first advent. "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," Luke 2:25-30.

The narrative continues: "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Luke 2:36-38.

Note the words, "all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." There was body of people back then



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awakened to the nearness of Christ's coming at His first advent.

So it will be at the end of this age. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which the Saviour introduced with the words: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom," Matthew 25:1.

The word 'then' takes us back to what He had been speaking about in the previous chapter. In that chapter the Saviour was answering the questions of His disciples. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:3. It has often been pointed out that the world wrongly translated 'world' here, is the Greek word 'aion' the English transliteration of which is 'eon' and which means a period of times or an age.

So the Saviour is speaking of the end of this age and it is to that He is referring when He employs the word 'then' in Matthew 25:1.

What does the Saviour tell us in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins? Very simply He shows that the 'visible' church, that made up the true and the false, the sheep and the goats, will fall into a state of slumber and carelessness and forgetfulness regarding His return. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept," Matthew 25:5.

But that is not allowed to continue indefinitely. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut," Matthew 25:6-10.

Here is an arousing of the careless and slumbering Church, and a readying of themselves, a trimming of the lamps that had long been neglected for the Saviour's return by those who had the 'oil' of true grace and then an entering in with the Saviour to His marriage banquet.

The false professors were shut out and lost, having never been known to the Lord as His true believers.

The first thing for God's people to do today is be busy trimming their lamps and letting them shine forth in a dark and Christ-rejecting world!

That is what it is to be in a state of 'blessing'.

2. The one watching for Christ is anxious about His appearance. "And keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

'Shamefulness' is something many glory in today. It is said of Adam and Eve, "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons," Genesis 3:7.

The modern daughter of Eve delights in nakedness and that without shame! It is a feature of this age particularly.

It is not something that should be seen amongst God's people! The word 'keepeth' means 'to attend to carefully'!

Young Christian ladies need to note that in particular. Here is the trend that they should follow. Not the fashions of the world with its shamelessness and lewdness but a careful maintenance of modesty. This is Paul's



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directive in 1 Timothy 2:9. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array."

There is to be a be an avoiding of making a display of oneself in order to be admired of others. This is what "becometh women professing godliness," verse 10.

Of course, there is a word for young Christian men as well. They are just as liable to follow the dictates of fashion. One of the most obvious trends is that of the untidy haircut without form or order! Shaved here, tousled there and altogether giving the appearance of having been 'pulled through a hedge backwards'!

Such may win approval on the 'street' but following the ways of the world does not please the Lord.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God," Romans 12:1-2.

Conformed means 'to fashion oneself' by the world's standards, but rather we are to transform, 'change oneself', into that which is different from the world. The word translated 'transformed' is the word used in Matthew 17:2 to describe what happened to the Lord on the mount. "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." The Saviour was seen in something of His heavenly glory. Does this not give you, young man, guidance as to the appearance you are to seek! You are to take on the likeness of heaven. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy," 1Peter 1:15-16. Heed these words.

I think that we may say that in the final days of this age we will see the true people of God returning to the demeanour, the display of these graces seen in the early Church when it was "edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," Acts 9:31.

May the Lord be pleased to hasten that day of restoration to the holiness of the early Church.

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