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***THE LIE:* THERE IS NO DEVIL.  
*THE TRUTH:* THE DEVIL OF THE BIBLE  
IS REAL AND HE IS OUR ENEMY.**

In the moments after my baptism, after that soggy hug with Miss Kay, we stood outside the church building. There Miss Kay told me what Jason had said.

She said, “Jason asked, ‘Does this mean the Devil doesn’t live in Daddy anymore?’”

With what I’d just experienced, I couldn’t deny that the Devil was very real and that he’d had me under his spell. But how did Jason already know about him?

“What did you tell him?”

She took my hands and smiled. She’d told Jason the Devil had been driven from me, but it didn’t mean it’d be smooth sailing. I’d still be rough around the edges, she told him. Rough edges. I suppose that was the kindest way to describe me. But Miss Kay assured me she’d take all my rough edges. She was just glad to have her family back.

The Devil, that father of lies who’d convinced me I needed my freedom, was gone. I could almost feel him leaving my body, my trailer, my land. In an instant my penchant for drinking, getting high, and cheating on Miss Kay had evaporated. My road of

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self-destruction and death had been rerouted. Newly soaked with the waters of a physical and spiritual baptism, I'd been set on the straight-and-narrow, and for the first time in my life, I really wanted to be good. But how is a bad man supposed to be good? Can you teach an old river rat new tricks?

I figured there was only one way to change my lifestyle. I'd need to shun all those lies I'd believed and walk into the truth. To do that, I needed space. I needed separation from those old boys who were running buddies with the Devil himself. But even though I knew what I needed to do, my life of new faith was not without setbacks.

In the first month of my conversion, one of my old buddies came along and asked me to go fishing with him. Fishing with an old friend in the middle of the afternoon couldn't hurt anything, could it? I asked him whether there was water in his cooler, and he said there was. With that, we were off.

An hour into our fishing expedition, with the Louisiana sun beating down on our boat, I went for the water. To my surprise, I discovered that he'd only brought a couple of six packs of beer. (Should I have been surprised? Liars lie, after all.) It was midday, and humidity had sucked every ounce of moisture from me. What was a thirsty man supposed to do? Couldn't I drink a beer or two and be fine? So I grabbed a can, pulled the tab, and drank.

Then I pulled the tab on another can.

Then another.

A few hours, a mess of catfish, and too many beers later, we headed back. When I stumbled back into the trailer, there was Miss Kay, sitting in her rocker and chatting with my parents who'd

come for an unexpected visit. She knew in an instant, but she asked anyway.

“Have you been drinking again?”

“It was all he had,” I said, half-lit as I stumbled to the bedroom.

I don't remember the crash landing, but I remember waking up hungover. It was Sunday, and when it came time to get ready for church, I told Miss Kay I didn't feel well. I'd rather stay home, I told her, and she capitulated at first. My mother, though, was not having a lick of it. She marched into my room, stared me down, and said, “Phil, get up. You're going to church.”

That settled that.

I sat through that church service, ashamed that I'd been tricked into drinking. I don't remember the sermon. I don't remember the songs we sang. I do remember the sense of conviction that plagued me throughout the service. I knew the truth—the truth that had set me free—and yet I'd fallen into the schemes of an untrustworthy friend. I'd fallen for the lie.

Near the end of the service, Bill Smith stood and offered an invitation to repent and turn to Jesus, and before the first bar of the first song was sung, I started making my way to the front. Bill met me there, and I told him I'd managed to get commode-hugging drunk the day before. He received my confession with more grace than I deserved, and after the invitation song was sung, he stood and shared my struggle with the congregation. To my great amazement, no one heaped judgment or shame on me. In fact, there was nothing but acceptance and love. An elderly lady, one I'd never met, came to me and said, “I love you, and I'm proud of you.” Another approached

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me and said, “God forgives you. That’s what the grace of God is all about. Get up and keep walking.”

When I walked out of church that morning, I knew I had to double down on my efforts to escape Satan’s snares. How could I go back to running with the good ol’ boys? Weren’t they living under the influence of the evil one? Weren’t they the ones who led me into the prison of my own desires? Didn’t they want to lure me back to those old haunts, the places that were devoid of peace? And this new family, this family of God, weren’t they more gracious and loving than any of my old running buddies?

I’d spent twenty-eight years under the influence of Satan. I knew it’d take time to untangle all those lies, and you can’t untangle the lies of the Devil when you’re running with his children. I knew what I needed to do, and I entered a self-imposed sort of holy witness protection program. We’d already moved, and the boys from Junction City didn’t know where I was living. I changed my phone number. I cut off communication with the men who’d trained me to follow my own desires. I stopped running around with Big Al and the crew once and for all. I lived like a recluse, almost as if I were in hiding for the first three months.

In those reclusive days, Bill invited me to a Bible study with a rather prolific group of well-known sinners. In that study he taught us the truth about sin and the father of sin. The Devil, he said, was the father of lies, and he was prowling, looking for an opening to steal us back. He taught us that the only way to combat the lies of Satan was to devote ourselves to the study of Scripture and to allow God to speak through its pages.

And so I devoted the majority of my waking hours to studying the Bible. I pored over the onion-skin pages and began to mark them up. I consumed the Word of God as if it were food and drank deeply from its waters of wisdom. As I read and read and read, I saw the truth about the human condition: every last one of us has been infected by sin; every last one of us is under the influence of the evil one.

As Miss Kay and I righted the ship of our marriage, I decided I needed to leave the oil fields and put my education to work. I had two college degrees and classroom experience, but I'd lost my teaching job in Junction City on account of my wayward lifestyle. What's more, I had a record with the law, a thing that doesn't earn you any points with high school administrators when you're looking to steer the lives of the town's youth. But, resolved to make good, I went to my new church family and asked them to put in a good word. Bill Smith reached out to contacts he had at a Christian school in Ouachita Parish, and though they would not hire me for a permanent position, they allowed me to substitute teach. I worked hard, did the best I could, and before long I was hired as coach and literature teacher at Ouachita Christian School.

Things were changing. The power of God was active in my life. This power was awakening me to the truth of the gospel: in Jesus I could beat sin and death; in Jesus I could have a new life. It stripped me of my desire to go back to my old partying ways, sure. Even more, it set me on a path of understanding. And in that understanding, an unquenchable desire to free others began to grow in me.



In that *Time* article from 1966, the German theologian Heinz Zahrnt addressed the question, “Is God dead?” clarifying “What is in question is God himself.” If God himself is in question, isn’t Satan in question too? If God is dead, what about the Devil?

There can be no doubt that the world would try to convince us that the Devil is dead, but it’s a specious argument, one based on circular reasoning. Both Scripture and my own personal experience undercut this argument. Truth is, my life attests: Satan, the father of all lies, the chief prevaricator, is very much alive. Truth is, he’d rather have you believe that he’s dead, inactive, or a myth if it’d keep you out of the arms of God.

The question of God—who first posed it? You know the story of Genesis, how God planted a garden and set a man named Adam in the middle of it. From Adam’s rib he cut a woman and named her Eve. As the story goes, God gave Adam and Eve full rule over the garden, with only one restriction. They could not eat of the tree in the center of the garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they did, God said, they would die. Seems simple enough, right?

Enter the Devil.

Taking the form of a serpent, the vile liar visited Eve and tempted her first with a question: “God told you not to eat from that tree?” Eve responded and said God had warned them that if they ate from the tree, mankind would be finished. That’s when the first lie entered the ears of a human. “But the serpent said to the woman,

‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Gen. 3:4–5 rsv). You can set yourself free of God, the Devil intimated; you can kill him and become your own god.

Sound familiar?

Eve was tricked by the Devil’s lies, and what was the result of that trick? Sin entered the world, and with it, an endless cycle of death and destruction. Into the world came drunkenness. Into the world came sexual immorality and perversion. Into the world came wars and rumors of wars. Into the world came violence and racial divide. The world was forever changed because of the crafty lies spun by a slithering serpent. Those lies have slithered on throughout history.

In the Gospels that record the life of Jesus, we see the Devil, still scheming, still spinning the same sorts of lies. In the eighth chapter of John, Jesus was speaking to the people, and some religious leaders were in the crowd. Jesus—a man known for saying it like it was—spoke the truth, said that every last one of them had been born into sin slavery. There was good news, though. He’d come to bring freedom, and if they followed his command, they’d be free indeed. That’s when the story turned. He turned to the religious leaders and uncovered their hidden motivation. They’d not come for freedom, he said; they’d come to kill him. But how did he know?

“I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence,” he said, “and you are doing what you have heard from your father.” As if to remove all doubt about who the father of the religious leaders was, Jesus spoke even more plainly. “If God were your Father, you

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would love me, for I have come here from God. . . . You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:38, 42, 44).

Jesus outed the truth. The Devil was alive and active, and he controlled the desires of the religious leaders of the day. What was the chief aim of the Devil, and consequently, what was the chief aim of the religious leaders? Murder. Murder Jesus. Murder God.

Murder, death, destruction—these are Satan's chief means of separating humans from God. Can't you see his work all around you? Hasn't it run amok in America? Suicide rates are at an all-time high.<sup>1</sup> Somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of marriages die in divorce.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of thousands of babies are aborted annually.<sup>3</sup> America is a slaughterhouse. Why? We've been enslaved by the power of the evil one, the murderer of all murderers.

But look here: if Satan can't kill you immediately, he has other tools at his disposal. He'll imprison you in your own desires or use your intellect against you until you go down to death. Drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, greed, false beliefs (like "God is dead")—these are among the tools Satan uses to keep us in bondage, to keep us from experiencing the freedom of God's kingdom before we take our last breath. Paul is clear about the tools of Satan, the tools he calls "the works of the flesh":

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and

the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19–21 NKJV)

Scripture is likewise clear about the primary influencer of our works of the flesh, our sins. As John wrote, “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8 NKJV). And his temptations toward sin aren’t just random or willy-nilly. He operates a highly organized crime syndicate, a ring of demons whose only goal is to pull us toward desire, and ultimately, destruction. As Paul reminds us, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).

Look around, America. Don’t you see Satan’s influence at work around you? The entertainment industry mocks religion and celebrates perversity. Universities teach the death of God and Satan with scientific precision. Physicians and psychologists tell us that when we die, the lights go out forever. Sin, the works of our flesh—can there be any question that Satan is alive and well in our country? And when you remove Christ from the public square, from court-houses and schools, when you bar truth from its institutions, should it come as a surprise that the Devil steps in to fill the void? Consider historical examples.

Consider Hitler. Some estimates indicate he killed six million Jews and committed numerous war atrocities. Where was Jesus in the Nazi regime? Nowhere.

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Remember Stalin and the Communists? They banished Jesus and subsequently became famous for murder.

What about ISIS? There's no Jesus in their midst, and what's their regime known for? Beheadings. Burnings. Rape. Murder. Death. Destruction.

As long as women keep birthing babies, as long as the human race continues to walk the earth, as long as the power of God allows, the Devil will be in business. Unchecked by the truth of Jesus, Satan is free to work his agenda—death. This agenda can take down a person, sure; this agenda can take down entire countries too.

There are two powers at war on this planet: the power of the living God and the power of the living Satan. One of those powers—the power of Satan—has been allowed to remain active on the earth, but only for a time. Ultimately, the power of God will rid the world of his lies. How do I know? The Scriptures tell us as much. As John wrote, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NKJV). As followers of Christ, our duty is to expose Satan and his agenda. It's our mission to warn our family, our friends, and our country of the death and destruction he brings. It's time to point to the snake tracks in the ground, to tell the people that as followers of Christ, we have the antivenin.



As I began to grow in my knowledge of Christ, as the lies of the Devil were exposed, I began to sense my time of witness protection was coming to a close. Before long the Christian needs to get busy,

needs to respond to his mission. He needs to speak the truth of Christ to a dying world. I was no exception.

Within a year Big Al had managed to track me down. (He was a crafty redneck.) He rolled up in the yard one afternoon with a couple of old buddies. He said they were going to State Line Road to party and promised it'd be a grand time. I knew better, knew the way that lie would turn out; I'd wind up drunk, hanging over a toilet, full of guilt and shame, unable to look my church family in the eye. So I told Big Al and the gang I wouldn't be joining them. He frowned and asked if I was on some sort of a religious kick.

"I believe this is something more than a religious kick," I said. "Boys, this is permanent."

They didn't mock me, didn't belittle me. They just stood there, confused.

"The one you're looking for," I told them, referring to the old Phil Robertson, "he's dead."

The old gang stood there perplexed, but Big Al did not hesitate to share his opinion. He said I couldn't stay committed to this nonsense of Jesus, and then for added effect, he said, "When all this is over, Phil, give me a call."

From time to time over those following years, a few of the dudes would come around. Time and time again, they'd make big promises of fun and freedom, promises I knew they couldn't fulfill. I stuck with my story, told them I'd given up that lifestyle. I'd decided to follow my Father, I said, the Father of truth. Over those years I stuck to my story, and some of them began to believe. Not Big Al, though, at least not until the end.

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Twelve years after my conversion, the phone rang.

“I need to talk with you.”

It was Big Al.

“Can you come up to Junction City?”

I hung up the phone, told Miss Kay that I thought his time had come. I made my way north to Arkansas, and the two of us met on the banks of the river. He stood there, softer than I’d ever remembered him.

“I’ve been keeping up with you,” he said, “and I must admit, I’ve never seen such a change in a man.” He looked down, kicked at the pine needles on the ground, and then said, “Guess what my doctor told me?”

“What?” I asked.

“It looks like I have an aneurysm in my heart that could burst at any moment.”

I sized him up and then asked, “So, are you having second thoughts about your atheism?”

Big Al nodded, then asked me what had made such a difference in my life. How had I changed? I relayed my conversion story, shared how I’d been a prisoner of the Devil and how God had freed me from that prison. I shared the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and the death, burial, and resurrection of Phil Robertson. I told him that the Devil had enslaved him through his own desires, but that God wanted to free him from that bondage. I gave him the unfiltered truth of God, shared the good news of Jesus with him, and when I was finished, I waited for his response.

“I tell you what,” he said, “because of this aneurysm, I don’t know if I’m going to make it. This story, if it’s true, it changes everything. I reckon I underestimated it.”

That was an understatement.

“Think you could take me down to the river and baptize me?”

“Yes,” I said, and that’s just what we did.

Two months later I received a phone call from Big Al’s wife. His aneurysm had burst, and he was gone. Before he passed he’d shared one last request. He wanted me to preach at his funeral. So, more than twelve years after I’d been run out of Junction City for being a no-good heathen, I showed up in plain clothes to preach Al’s funeral. Come to find out, Big Al had become quite the figure in Junction City, and the whole town showed up for his funeral. It was a packed house. But how many of the congregants knew the truth of Al’s life? How many knew about his conversion?

“Let me tell you a story about the man in the casket,” I said. “His body is there, but he’s gone. A couple of months ago, I had the privilege of baptizing Al into the family of Christ. He cut it thin,” I said, “but he made it.”

There was a near-audible gasp, and many in the room began to cry. I shared the story, and in that story I laid out the good news of Jesus. I told them that Jesus wanted to set them free, just like he had Al. When I’d finished my remarks, I looked out at the audience. There was not a dry eye. Before leaving the stage, I looked down in the casket.

“My old buddy, I’ll see you again.”

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Al, the staunchest atheist I'd ever met, had unwound the lies of the Devil before the end. He'd been freed from Satan's power, freed from the power of death too. He'd become a child of God.

Big Al could be a testament to America, if only we'd hear it. Sure, we might be under the spell of the Devil; we might be tangled up in his lies. We might celebrate violence and drunkenness and sex and drugs, success, wealth, scientific advancement—anything really. But if we face our own mortality, if we come to see that without Jesus we're on the road to eternal death—just as I did, just as Big Al did—we can come into a new season of freedom. That freedom, though, won't come without an awakening, without an infusion of absolute truth, and this is the absolute truth—the real and living God wants to free us from death; he wants to free us to flourish.