

The Devil and the Church!

by E.M. Bounds—1835-1913

The devil is too wise, too large in mental grasp, too lordly in ambition, to confine his aims to the individual. He seeks to direct the policy and sway the scepter of nations. In his largest freedom, and in his delirium of passion and success, “he goes out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth.” He is an adept in deception, an expert in all cunning arts. An archangel in execution, he often succeeds in seducing the nations most loyal to Christ, leading them into plans and principles which pervert and render baneful all Christly principles. The Church itself, the bride of Christ, when seduced from her purity, degenerates into a worldly ecclesiasticism.

The “gates of Hell shall not prevail” against the Church. This promise of our Lord stands against every Satanic device and assault. But this immutable word as to the glorious *outcome*, does not protect the Church from the devil’s stratagems which may, and often do, pervert the aims of the Church and postpone the day of its final triumph.

The devil is a hydra-headed monster. He is hydra-headed in plans and wisdom — as well as in monstrosities. His master and supreme effort is to get control of the Church, not to destroy its organization, but to abate and pervert its Divine ends. This he does in the most insidious way, seemingly innocent, no startling change, nothing to shock nor to alarm. Sometimes the destructive change is introduced under the disguise of a greater zeal for Christ’s glory. Introduced by someone high in church honor, often it occurs that the advocate of these measures is totally ignorant of the fact that the tendency is subversive.

One of the schemes of Satan to debase and pervert, is to establish a wrong estimate of church strength. If he can raise false measurements of church power; if he can press the material to the front; if he can tabulate these forces so as to make them imposing and aggregating in commands, influence, and demand — he has secured his end.

In the Mosaic economy, the subversion of the ends of the Church and the substitution of material forces was guarded against. Their kings were warned against the accumulation, parade, and reliance on material forces. It was in the violation of this law, that David sinned when he yielded to the temptation of Satan to number the people.

To this, the third temptation of our Lord was directed. In measure, such temptation by which the devil tried Jesus was intended to subvert the ends of His kingdom by substituting material elements of strength, for the spiritual.

This is one of the devil’s most insidious and successful methods to deceive, divert and deprave. He marshals and parades the most engaging material results, lauds the power of civilizing forces and makes its glories and power pass in review — until church leaders are dazzled, and ensnared, and the Church becomes thoroughly worldly while boasting of her spirituality.

No deceiver is so artful in the diabolical trade of deception, as Satan. As an angel of light, he leads a soul to death. To mistake the elements of church strength, is to mistake the character of the Church, and also to change its character all its efforts and aims.

The strength of the Church lies in its *piety*. All else is incidental. But in worldly, popular language of this day, a church is called strong when its membership is large, when it has social position and large financial resources. The church is thought successful when ability, learning, and eloquence fill the pulpit, and when the pews are filled by fashion, intelligence, money and influence. An estimate of this kind, is worldly to the fullest extent.

The church that thus defines its strength, is on the highway to apostasy. The strength of the Church does not consist of any or all of these things. The *faith, holiness* and *zeal* of the Church are the elements of its power. *Church strength does not consist in its numbers and its money — but in the holiness of its members.* Church strength is not found in these worldly attachments or endowments — but in the endowment of the Holy Spirit on its members. No more fatal or deadly symptom can be seen in a church, than this transference of its strength from spiritual to material forces, from the Holy Spirit to the world. The power of God in the Church is the measure of its strength, and is the estimate which God puts on it, and not the estimate the world puts on it. Here is the measure of its ability to meet the ends of its being.

On the contrary, show us a church, poor, illiterate, obscure and unknown, but composed of praying people. They may be men of neither *worldly ability* nor *wealth* nor *influence*. They may be families that do not know one week where they are to get their bread for the next. But with them is “the hiding of God’s power,” and their influence will be felt for eternity, and their light shines, and they are watched. Wherever they go, there is a fountain of light, and Christ in them is glorified and His kingdom advanced. They are His chosen vessels of salvation and His luminaries to reflect His light.

There are signs everywhere unmistakable and of dire import that Protestantism has been blinded and caught by Satan’s dazzling glare!

We are being seriously affected by the material progress of the age. We have heard so much of it, and gazed on it so long — that spiritual things are tame to us. Spiritual views have no form nor loveliness to us. Everything must take on the rich colorings, luxuriant growth and magnificent appearance of the material — or else it is beggarly. This is the most

perilous condition the Church has to meet, when the meek and lowly fruits of piety — are to be discounted by the showy and worldly things with which material success crowds the Church.

We must not yield to the flood. We must not for a moment, not the hundredth part of an inch, give place to the world. Piety must be stressed in every way and at every point. The Church must be made to see and feel this delusion and snare, this transference of her strength from God to the world, this rejection of the Holy Spirit by the endowment of “might and power,” and this yielding to Satan. The Church more and more is inclined not only to disregard, but to despise, the elements of spiritual strength and set them aside — for the more impressive worldly ones.

We have been and are schooling ourselves into regarding as elements of church prosperity — only those items which make showings in a statistical column, and which impress an age given up to worldly facts and figures. And as the most vital spiritual conditions and gains cannot be reduced to figures, they are left out of the column and its aggregates, and after a while they will neither be noted nor estimated. If we do not call a halt and change our methods, the whole estimate of the strength of a church will be supremely worldly. However imposing our material results may be, however magnificent and prosperous the secular arm of the Church appears — we must go deeper than these for its strength. We must proclaim it, and iterate and reiterate it with increased emphasis, that the strength of the Church does not lie in these things.

These may be but the *gilded delusions* which we mistake for the true riches, and while we are vainly saying, “We are rich and increased in goods,” God has written of us that we are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!” They will be, if we are not sleeplessly vigilant — but the costly spices and splendid decoration which embalm and entomb our spirituality. *True strength lies in the vital godliness of the people.* The aggregate of the personal holiness of the members of each church — is the only true measure of strength. Any other test offends God, dishonors Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit, and degrades religion.

A church can often make the fairest and best showing of material strength when death in its deadliest form is feeding on its vitals. There can scarcely be a more damaging delusion than to judge of the conditions of the Church by its material exhibits or churchly activity. *Spiritual barrenness and rottenness in the Church are generally hidden by a fair exterior and an obtrusive parade of leaves and an exotic growth.* A *spiritual* church converts souls from sin soundly, clearly and fully.

This spirituality is not a by-play, not to be kept in a corner of the Church, not its dress for holiday or parade days, but it is its chief and only business. If God’s Church is not doing this work of converting sinners to holiness and perfecting saints in holiness, wherever and whenever this work is not blazing and conspicuous, wherever and whenever this work becomes secondary, or other interests are held to be its equivalent — then the Church has become worldly! Wherever and whenever the material interests are emphasized until they come into prominence, then the world comes to the throne and sways the scepter of Satan.

There is no readier and surer way to make the Church worldly — than to put its material prosperity to the forefront; and no surer, readier way to put Satan in charge. It is an easy matter for worldly assessments to become of first importance, by emphasizing them until a sentiment is created that these are paramount. When collecting money, building churches, and statistical columns are to stand as evidences of real church prosperity — then the world has a strong lodgment, and Satan has gained his end.

Another scheme of Satan is to eliminate from the Church all the lowly self-denying ordinances which are offensive to unsanctified tastes and unregenerate hearts, and reduce the Church to a mere human institution — popular, natural, fleshly and pleasing.

Satan has no scheme more fearfully destructive and which can more thoroughly thwart God’s high and holy purposes — than to transform God’s Church and make it a human institution according to man’s views. God’s right arm is thereby paralyzed, the body of Christ has become the body of Satan, light turned into darkness, and life into death.

Men who sit in apostolic seats often through a marvelous blindness, sometimes through a false attachment to what they deem truth, and for what they consider the honor of Christ — are found trying to eliminate from the system of Christ those painful, offensive, unpopular, and self-denying features to which it owes all its saving efficacy, and beauty and power, and which stamp it as divine.

We have a painful illustration most instructive and warning in Peter, recorded thus: “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is

going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done!"
Matthew 16:21-27

Here is a lesson most suggestive, a lesson for all times, a warning for each man, for all men, for church men, for saintly men and for apostolic men. *An apostle has become the mouthpiece of Satan!* Alarming, horrible, unnatural and revolting picture! An apostle, zealous for his Master's glory, advocating with fire and force a scheme which would forever destroy that glory! An apostle, the apostle Peter — Satan's vice-regent! The apostle who had but just made that inspired confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," which placed him in highest honor and commendation with Christ and the Church! Before the words of that divine and marvelous confession had died from his lips, this same apostle is the inflamed and self-willed advocate of views and plans which will render his confession void, and raze the impregnable and eternal foundations of the Church.

Peter, a chief apostle, fathering and advocating schemes which would discrown Christ of His Messiahship, and bring Heaven's favorite plan to a most disastrous and shameful end!

How did this come about? What baneful impulse impels Peter? Satan has entered him and for the time being, has mastered his purposes, and so Christ reproves Peter, but in the reproof strikes a crushing blow at Satan. "Get behind me, Satan," a reminder and duplicate of the wilderness temptation. "You are a stumbling block to me." The devil's trigger to catch Christ in the devil's trap, "You do not have in mind the things of *God* — but the things of *men*."

The devil is not in sight. Man appears and his views are pressed to the front. The things which men savor in church plans and church life, are against God's plan. The high and holy principles of self-denial, of unworldliness of life, and of self-surrender to Christ, are all against men's view of religion, a losing thing with them. The devil does not seek to destroy the Church directly. Men's views would eliminate all these unpopular principles of the cross, self-denial, life surrender and world surrender. But when this is done, the devil runs the Church. Then it becomes popular, cheery, flesh-pleasing, modern and progressive.

But it is the devil's church founded on principles pleasing in every way to flesh and blood! No Christ is in it, no crucifixion of self, no crucifixion of the world, no eternal judgment, no everlasting Hell, no eternal Heaven. Nothing is in it that savors of God, but all that savors of men. Man makes the devil's church, by turning Christ's Church over to worldly leaders. The world is sought and gained in the devil's church, but the man, the soul, Heaven, are all lost — lost to all eternity.

The very heart of this disgraceful apostasy, this dethroning Christ and enthroning the devil — is to remove the Holy Spirit from His leadership in the Church, and put in unspiritual men as leaders to plan for and direct the Church. The strong hands of men of great ability and men with the powers of leadership — have often displaced God's leadership. The ambition for, and the enthronement of worldly leadership — is the doom and seal of apostasy. There is no true leadership in God's Church but the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The man who has the most of God's Spirit is God's chosen leader, ambitious and zealous for the Spirit's sovereignty, ambitious to be the least, the slave of all.

There are two ways of directing the Church — God's way and the devil's way. God's way and man's way of running the Church are entirely opposite. Man's wise plans, happy expedients and easy solutions, are Satan's devices. The *cross* is retired — and the *world* comes in. Self-denial is eliminated — and all seems bright, cheerful and prosperous. But Satan's hand is on the ark, men's schemes prevail, the Church fails under these attractive devices of men, and the church's spiritual bankruptcy is complete.

All God's plan's have the mark of the *cross* on them, and all His plans have *death to self* in them. All God's plans have *crucifixion to the world* in them. But men's plans ignore the offense of the cross — or despise it. Men's plans have no profound, stern or self-immolating denial in them. Their gain is of the world. How much of these destructive elements, esteemed by men, does the devil bring into the Church, until all the high, unworldly and holy aims, and heavenly objects of the church are retired and forgotten?

One of these attractive, man-savoring, Satanic devices — is to pervert the aims of the Church so that the main object of the Church is not so much to save individuals out of society — as to save society; not to save *souls* — so much as to save the community. The world, not the individual, is the subject of redemption.

This popular, seductive and deadly fallacy, entirely subverts the very foundation of Christ's Church. Its materializing trend is so strong that it will sweep away every vestige of the spiritual and eternal — if we do not watch, work and speak with sleepless vigilance, tireless energy, and fearless boldness. The attitude and open declaration of much of the religious teaching we now hear, is in the same strain and spirit which characterized Unitarian, Jewish, or rationalistic utterances half a century ago.

To save society is a kind of *religious fad* to which much enterprising, lauded church work is committed. Advanced thinkers and discoverers have elaborated the same idea. They entomb religion in the grave where Judaism has been buried all these centuries.

The phrase "to save the world," has a pompous sounding; and it is appealing to flesh and blood, for the Church to apply itself to *bettering the temporal surroundings* of the individual, and improve his sanitary conditions; to lessen the bad

smells that greet his nose, to diminish the bacteria in his water, and to put granite in the pavement for him to walk on instead of wood or brick.

All this sounds finely, and agrees well with a material age, and becomes practical in operation, and evident and imposing in results.

But does this agree with the sublime dignity and essential aim of the Church? Do we need any Church to secure these ends? Councilmen of common talent, an efficient street commissioner, and the ordinary vigilance of the average policeman, will secure these results in their best way.

It needs no Church, no Bible, no Christ, no personal holiness, to secure these ends — and this is the point to which all this vaunted advance tends. If the ends of the Church are directed to those results which can be as well or better secured by other agencies — then the Church will soon be regarded as a nuisance, a thing to be abated by the most summary process.

The purposes of the Church of God rise in sublime grandeur above these childish dreams and decadent philosophies. Its purpose is to regenerate and sanctify the individual, to make him holy and prepare him by a course of purifying and training, for the high pursuits of an eternal life. The Church is like the net cast into the sea. The purpose is not to change the sea — so much as to catch the fishes out of the sea. Let the sea roll on in its essential nature, but the net catches its fishes.

No bigger fools would ever be found than fishermen who were spending all their force trying by some chemical process to change the essential elements of the sea, vainly hoping thereby to improve the stock of the fish that they had not and never could catch. By this method, personal holiness, the great desideratum for church operation and ends, would be impossible, and Heaven would be stricken from creed and life and hope.

To save the world and ignore the individual, is not only foolishly utopian, but every way damaging. It is the process, fair and laudable in name, to save the world, but in results it is to lose the Church, or, which amounts to the same, making the Church worldly — and thereby unfitting her for her holy and sublime mission. Christ said that gaining the world and saving the man, are antagonistic ends. Christ teaches Peter that his Satanic device would gain the world to and for the Church — but would lose the soul. Everything would seem thrifty to the worldly cause — when in reality all was death.

The Church is distinctly, preeminently and absolutely a spiritual institution — that is, an institution created, vitalized, possessed and directed by the Spirit of God. Her machinery, rites, forms, services and officers have no loveliness, no pertinency, no power — except as they are channels of the Holy Spirit. It is His indwelling and inspiration, which make its divine being and secure its divine end. If the devil can by any methods shut the Holy Spirit out from the Church — he has effectually barred the church from being God's Church on earth. He accomplishes this by retiring from the Church, the agencies or agents which the Holy Spirit uses — and displaces them by the natural, which are rarely if ever the media of His energy. Christ announced the universal and invariable law when He said, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit."

The Church may have a holy preacher, a man of great prayerfulness, of great grace, filled with the Spirit. But if Satan can by any method retire him, and put a man of no prayerfulness, plausible, eloquent and popular — the Church may seem to have gained, but it has gained by the substitution of natural for spiritual forces, a gain which has all unconsciously revolutionized the Church.

Imagine a church with the leadership of holy men, not highly cultured, but well-versed in the deep things of God, and strong in devotion to Christ and His cause, not wealthy, nor of high social position. Now change these officers and put in men who are every way decent in morality, but not given or noted for prayer and piety, men of high social position and fine financiers, and the Church scarcely realizes the change — except marked improvement in finances. But an invisible and mighty change has taken place in the Church, which is radical. It has changed from a *spiritual* Church to a *worldly* one. The change from noonday to midnight, is not more extreme than that. At this point Satan is doing his deadliest and most damning work — the more deadly and damning because it is unnoticed, unseen, producing no shock and exciting no alarm.

It is not by overt, conspicuous evil that Satan perverts the Church — but by quiet displacement and by unnoticed substitution. The spiritual gives place to the social — and the divine is eliminated, because it is made secondary.

The perversion and subversion of the Church is secured by Satan when the spiritual forces are retired or made subordinate to the natural; and social entertainment, and not edification becomes the end. This process involves not only the aims and ends of entertainment, but it is intended to soften and modify the distinctly spiritual aim, and to widen from what is deemed the rigid exclusiveness of spiritual narrowness. But in the end it eliminates all that is distinctly spiritual, and that which is in any sense deeply religious will not survive the death of the spiritual. *Edification* as the end of God's Church is wholly lost sight of — and *entertainment*, that which is pleasing and pleasant, comes to the forefront! The *social* forces not only retire the *spiritual* forces, but effectually destroy them.

A modern church with its kitchen and dining room, with its club and gymnasium, and with its ministries to the flesh and to the world — is both appealing and alarming. How suggestive in the contrast it presents between the agencies which

the primitive Church originated and fostered, as the conservator of its principles and the expression of its life, and those which the modern and progressive Church presents as its allies or substitutes.

The original institutions were wholly spiritual, calculated to strengthen and cultivate all the elements which combine to make a deep and clear experience of God. They were training schools for the spiritual life, as the chief end. They never lingered in the regions of the aesthetic and the worldly. They fostered no taste nor inclination which was not spiritual, and which did not minister to the soul's advance in divine things.

They took it for granted that all who came to them, really desired to flee from the wrath to come, and were sincerely desiring after Christlikeness, and that their obligation to furnish to these the best aids, were of the most sacred and exacting kind. It never occurred to them that sports or social events were channels through which God's grace would flow and could be laid under tribute for spiritual uses.

These *social* and *fleshly* events are regarded in many quarters as the perfection of spiritual things. These agencies are arrayed as the mature fruit of spiritual piety, flavored and perfected by its culture and progress, and ordained henceforth as the handmaids of the prayer and preaching meeting. We object most seriously to the union. What have they in common? "How indeed can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"

What elements of piety are conserved by social events and entertainment? What phases of spiritual life do they promote? By what feature of the gymnasium is faith invigorated? Where do you find in it any elements which are distinctly pious, or are aids to piety? How do social events produce a more prayerful, a holier life? What secret springs has entertainment to bring the soul nearer to God? Wherein does it form or strengthen the ties of a Christly fellowship? Is it not frivolous and worldly? Is it not sensuous and fleshly? Does it not cater to and suit the tastes of the carnal, the superficial and worldly? What unity of purpose and spirit is there between the gymnasium and witnessing for Christ? The one is intensely spiritual — the other has in it no jot or tittle of spiritual uses.

We might as well add to the list of heavenly helpers, the skating rink, calisthenics and the gymnasium. If the young people desire to join a gym, enjoy a social or have fun — then let them do so; but do not deceive them and degrade piety by calling these things holy institutions and nourishers of spiritual life.

Disguise it as we may; reason about it as we will; apologize for it as we do; we may vainly philosophize of growth and change and culture. But the truth is, we have lost that intense type of personal experience, that deep conviction of eternal things which are such evident features of all great spiritual movements. Many preachers and people have fallen so low in their experience that they do not relish these distinct and strongly spiritual agencies; and are devising schemes and institutions to gratify their non-spiritual tastes with schemes which are midway between Christ and the world; which, while not essentially wrong, do not possess one grain of spiritual power, and can never be the channels of heavenly grace.

It is said we cannot get the people to attend the distinctly spiritual means of grace. What is the trouble? Are the institutions worn out and no longer of value to the humble, pious soul? Who will dare affirm this? The tastes of the people are base and perverted. Shall we then change the agencies to suit their unsanctified appetites? No! Let us tone up the appetite for spiritual things, and correct and elevate the tastes of our people.

Let the revolution begin with the preacher. Let him wrestle with God until his ordination vow becomes vitalized, so that all can feel the pressure of his aim, the ardor of his zeal, his singleness of purpose, and the holiness and elevation of his life — and until the people catch the fire and purpose of his heart, and all press on to Christlikeness.

Under this united, mighty, divine impulse — entertainment and the social meeting will be forgotten and become stale, and all saintly assemblies will be attractive and delight some.

The Church cannot confederate with non-spiritual agencies. By doing this, she discards the Holy Spirit. She cannot be the caterer to unsanctified desires. Neither is it her province to fall down to the beggarly task of *entertaining* the people. This is her saddest mistake, when her solemn assemblies are surrendered to the concert and social, her praise is turned into worldly music, her classrooms are turned into parlors, her socials become more popular than her prayer-meetings, the house of God made a house of feasting, and social cheer is sought after rather than a house of prayer. The unity of the Spirit and the holy brotherhood are displaced and destroyed — to make room for social affinities and worldly attractions. Her high and royal duty, that by which she maintains her spotless fidelity to her Lord — is to stress holiness and afford all means for its advancement and growth. This done, spiritual character and affinities will order all the rest.