O God our Father, as we become better acquainted with the devil, help us to know how to avoid his acquaintance. We thank Thee for Edwards’s contribution to knowledge about someone concerning whom we should have no familiar knowledge. We pray that Thou will bless us, that we may flee from the evil one when we can, and resist him always as we must. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

We’re dealing now with Edwards’s view of the devil’s stratagems. Years ago when I was still teaching in the seminary, a student wrote for me a master’s thesis on the history of the devil, and I said to him when he gave it to me that I supposed he was happy to be finished with the devil. He said he was happy to be finished with the devil, but he’d be much happier when the devil was finished with him. And if you want the devil to be finished with you, I think perhaps you better pay close attention to some of his strategies as they are spelled out by Jonathan Edwards.

“The devil,” Edwards preached, “is exceedingly great in his endeavors for the destruction of men’s souls. He’s the strong man, the greatest murderer, the destroyer. Thousands go to hell daily by his stratagems, but still he is not glutted. He likes to hear the shrieks of the damned. He ‘trickles with blood,’ malice and cruelty is his nature.” Edwards even traces this spirit to Satan before the fall in a sense. Lucifer began with a proud and spiteful spirit against God, which has reigned in him ever since. It is his pride that makes it impossible for him to bear seeing others happy. He is constantly using his serpentine cleverness by which he affected the fall of man in the first place, and he never wearies. Having been active in the old world with David, then Christ, Judas, Peter, and in the future he will create the antichrist.

How does the devil go about his devilish ways so successfully? Says Edwards, “by blinding and deceiving.” The very darkness of this world comes from the darkness of the bottomless pit. Satan suggests thoughts, such as casting one’s self from the
temple, taking the census, betraying Christ, as well as forwarding men’s natural lusts. How all of this is done cannot be certainly determined, but Edwards makes a few suggestions. First, the devil by working on the humors of the body, as he would say, and second by making impressions on the imaginations of the mind concerning the pleasures of sins and the like or wrong impressions of the injury they will receive in the service of virtue, etc. The appeal in this particular sermon is to natural men who suppose that some human enemy were constantly stalking them. This is Edwards’s sort of theory of paranoia. The paranoids are chasing us and so on. Edwards died, as I remind you, in 1758, long before psychotherapy and psychiatry are much on the scene. He had a sort of all-comprehended term in those days for mental apparitions, and that was *melancholy*. And Edwards wrote about that considerably and there was some of it in his relatives and all, but even though he doesn’t use the language that’s common today, one can see that he’s quite aware of some of these pitfalls of the human mind. And while he wouldn’t trace them all to the devil, the devil will always be happy about them if the devil were capable of being happy about it and do everything he can to contribute to the psychological as well as the physical misery of mankind.

“The devil is a liar. He was the first to lie, and he lied first in this world, becoming the father of lies.” He means by that, Satan lied even in heaven when he told his fellow angels that they could successfully revolt against God. That was a lie, and he’s been telling lies ever since, but Edwards pointed out that when he had influence on earth, he became the father of lies here. “That is his means of setting up and of keeping up his dominion. It’s the power of darkness. Islam,” says Jonathan Edwards, “could not exist without him.” He’s the father of all those principles that tend to lie such as hatred and enmity.

But how does one know when the devil is suggesting, when lies are from this particular prince of darkness? Edwards says, “There is a sure way of detecting a lie which if Satan hasn’t originated, he certainly is co-sponsoring and that is this: what Satan says does not have foundation in the Word of God. What Satan says never has foundation in the Word of God. And if the suggestion goes beyond the Bible, one must not trust it.” In his Genesis 3:4 sermon Edwards teaches that some are bewitched into thinking that there will be no punishment, a particularly attractive satanic ploy. People usually believe him. In spite of his unbiblical character and teaching, the devil is “orthodox in his faith.” He believes the true
system of doctrine. He is no deist, Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, or antinomian,” says Edwards. “The articles of his faith are all sound and in them he is thoroughly established. He knows the truth, but he does not tell it. He knows lies, because he knows the truth from which they depart and these he loves to tell.”

Perhaps Satan’s master strategy is to appear as an angel still, as if he had never been cast out of heaven, as if he were not a devil. Satan “often transforms himself into an angel of light,” says Edwards. “He does this as a teacher of false doctrine. As such, he predominates in the whole world. The whole kingdom of antichrists is his. He pretends that the doctrine is from God as in Islam, Romanism, Quakerism. He even represents these errors as saving doctrines. As a counselor, the devil directs men’s practices.” I can’t help laugh here because counseling was not the science that it is today in Edwards’s time, but he could have been delivering this in 1986 instead of 1746 and so on. Not that all counselors, of course, are unsound, but much of what goes by the name of counseling at the present time is something other than the course of wisdom. “Satan passes off the pursuit of the world,” notice this, “as a care of family. He passes off anxiety as prudence; liberality is made to appear prodigality, and strife is deliberately confused with zeal. In all of this the devil uses the Bible constantly,” says Edwards, “flattery gets the devil everywhere.”

I call your attention to the fact that Edwards is not contradicting himself when he says on the one hand that you can detect satanic suggestion by its not being founded on the Bible, departing from the Bible, being contrary to the Bible, and so on, and at the same time says that the devil constantly uses the Bible. What he means by that is the devil constantly abuses the Bible. The devil, appearing as an angel of light, pretends to be presenting the truth, which he knows professionally. If there was ever a superior theologian as Jonathan Edwards, it’s undoubtedly the devil. The devil knew Reformed theology far better than Jonathan Edwards or Augustine and Calvin put together. And he knows the Bible better than they ever knew it, and he understands it better. But at the same time, because he hates it and lies about it, he’s a master of perverting it, and at the same time, trying to persuade the individual this is a truth of God itself. So he . . . you can detect him by the Bible, by the way he uses the Bible, as a matter of fact, but if you’re not a careful Bible student and say silly things—this is Gerstner talking now, not Edwards, but I think Edwards would say, “Amen” if he were able to—makes silly statements such as that you can get anything that you want out of the Bible. It’s a
plastic nose; you can shape it anyway you wish. I hear thousands of human beings saying that, not suspecting for a moment that a mouthpiece of the father of lies when they say it.

So let’s be clear on this point, as far as Jonathan Edwards is concerned: the Bible is mastered by the devil, and in his presentation of it, it is constantly twisted so that persons who do not pay careful attention to the Bible can easily be misled by Satan, but there is only one way, really, of not being misled, and that is by a sound understanding of the Bible.

The devil now in his relationships more specifically, now that we would see how the devil is related to the range of being, that we consider his fellow devils, then men who he directly controls, and then men in general, saints, and finally God Himself. With respect to his fellow devils, it appears that Satan is an absolute monarch, the boss of the under, underworld, the godfather of the devils. In Edwards’s words, “Satan is more frequently spoken of singly in Scripture than devils are spoken of in the plural, as though he were more than all the rest. His strength and subtlety are very great indeed. So much superior to the rest that he maintains a dominion over them and is able to govern and manage them that they dare not raise rebellion against him. Agreeable to Job 41:25, ‘When he raises up himself the mighty are afraid.’ All the rest of the devils are his servants, his wretched slaves. They are spoken of as his possession in Matthew 25:41, ‘the devil and his angels.’” That’s a rather unusual thought, isn’t it? That even the devils themselves who do so much devilish harm by themselves are the victims of the devil. The devils would probably like to escape the devil.

There’s also demoniacal possession of men. According to Edwards, “Those who neglect salvation under warnings are in a way that tends to great hardening of witchcraft.” That he mentions in an unpublished sermon on Romans 11:7. “Once men become magicians and witches they are less likely to give up their trade because they are more under the power of Satan,” he continues. “Christ, of course, did deliver some from bodily possession by devils, but also from possession of the soul, which was greater and has continued after miraculous deliverances have ceased.” In other word, Edwards does not believe in exorcism at the present time, except the exorcism of the devil from the soul in conversion, but that in biblical time there was exorcism of a devil even from bodily possession of humans. There are different ways of bodily possession—dumb devils, spirit of infirmity, etc.—the same is true
of mental possession, pride notice, maliciousness, drunkenness, uncleanness—Edwards ties up. Don’t misunderstand even me or him at this particular point. He is not unaware of the fact that there’s a distinction between sickness and satanic possession of body or mind, but he is saying that possession does also affect these others things as well.

I had a man visit me once, and he talked about a student on his campus. He was a professor, and this student, he said, had the power of discernment, and when I asked the man how he knew that this student had the power of discernment, it turned out that it’s because the student said he had so. There was no evidence of it at all. And Edwards would say he’d pay to see him himself and supposing that he discerns the devil by being colossally blind to the devil.

I’ve tracked Edwards’s references to witches because, as you realize, he’s in the next century after the great and dreadful developments at Salem at the end of the preceding century. Edwards says very little about witches. I think we can safely, but however, tentatively conclude that he believed there were men and women who had a direct line to hell, as it were, that the devil had indeed direct influence on them, but I would surmise from what I read and don’t read in Edwards that he doesn’t believe that we can detect such persons now as they could have been detected and were by Christ, for example, in the apostolic age, and he does not, the inference would be from that view that the Salem episode could have been a valid thing long before Judge Sewell admitted his connivance and so on. To say I have to feel my way tentatively, there’s no question that Edwards believed that there were such things as witches, and there were probably witches in his own time, but it seems to me that he’s saying we can’t recognize them and we can’t exorcise them at the present time, and that what we have to do is exercise ourselves in the Word of God not to be deceived, by these suggestions and these channels of imagination that the devils do actually use. They’re very real, they’re very potent, and they must be guarded against and in that sense, the devils are taken very seriously by Jonathan Edwards, but beyond that I don’t think we are able to go.

“There seems to have been a special ordering of providence that accounts for so many being possessed at the time of Christ,” Edwards thought. “It made Christ’s messianic glory appear all the brighter.” Here again, I can’t help [dwelling] on the fact that Edwards sees theodicy or the purpose of God at all times; even
when the scene is blackest he suspects it’s a way by making the brightness of the divine appearance all the more evident and glorious. And so here as more demonic possession, . . . but as soon Edwards mentions that, he conjectures the purpose of it is, the reason God has decreed it, the reason God has permitted it is not because of the blackness but because that blackness accentuates a glory of the manifestation of the Son of God in human flesh.

“Exorcism,” says Edwards, “was Christ’s greatest victory over devils.” While the devil possesses the bodies of few men, he nevertheless controls all souls of unredeemed men. “Wicked men are the devil’s captives. Satan naturally dwells in the hearts of fallen men. Indeed the whole world is like the man possessed by the devil.” Edwards is suggesting here in a sermon on Luke 8:26 that this is a possessed world. Talk about demoniacal possession of bodies . . . The whole world is possessed, not bodily, but far more importantly soulishly by the devil except as delivered by Christ.

How the devil does work in the heart of a sinner is explained on some occasions; for example, men in this world fear the judgment of God and hope that there will not be another world. That’s very natural. I met a man once who said he believed in God, and he was sitting very comfortably on his sofa and utterly unperturbed, and I drew once conclusion—that he didn’t believe in God, that he didn’t believe in the devil, that he didn’t believe in hell, or he would never had been so complacent as all that. But truth of the matter is that people who do believe in hell, and anybody who doesn’t believe in hell doesn’t know his Bible or doesn’t believe it, he doesn’t naturally, he’s afraid. He wants to get it out of thought or think it out of existence or something like that. This is where the devil comes in. “When such wishful thinking occurs and men entertain,” says Edwards, “such ideas, the devil sets in to enforce them.” This is his playground. He loves that. He’s got an open door here. Perfect entrée. I think the hearers of these tapes much realize that it’s a very, very dangerous business to entertain fallacious, anti-biblical thoughts. You’re not going to be alone. There are going to be a whole host of beings who are going to be right, ready at hand to help you, is what Edwards is saying.

Though the devil is a cruel master, men bear his image nevertheless. They pride themselves, men do, on their freedom while being his slaves all the while. Edwards doesn’t say this, but I’d say it, that men are never more under the power of the devil than when they deny the very existence of the devil. But it is not
the men whom the serpent does control, but those whom he does not who interest Edwards most and interest the devil most, and he brings forth his greatest efforts to seduce them. First, it is clear that according to Edwards the converted are released from the overpowering control of Satan, but that does not imply, however, that Satan cannot profoundly affect them even to the point of their gross denial of Jesus Christ, as in the notorious case of Peter. And on that text of Peter’s being sifted by Satan, Edwards has a powerful, still unpublished sermon.

While I’m on this matter of unpublished sermons, let me mention this as an aside. I understand that the Yale University Press has decided to publish all the sermons of Jonathan Edwards. At the present time, there’s fewer than one hundred of them in print, and I certainly hope that desire and intention is carried out, but I’m citing constantly in these addresses from the manuscript sermons mainly at the Beinecke Library.

“The devil’s main channel,” says Edwards, “of influence is through the imagination of the saints.” May I remind you that when we talked about the way of knowing according to Jonathan Edwards, it begins with sense, and then there’s imagination, and there’s memory, and finally judgment. It’s through the imagination that the devil finds his easiest entry or purposes of tempting. “The main channel of influence,” says Edwards, “is through the imagination of the saints who are not immune to the satanic power, even though they are not under its domination as they were before they were delivered by a man who is stronger than the strong man. This is the reason Satan is especially successful with the melancholy.” Today, the word melancholy, you see, doesn’t have the same ring that it had in Burton’s book and in Edwards’s time, and so melancholy in those days was almost a wrap-up term for all kinds of mental instability. It doesn’t just mean sadness, as we tend to think of it today, but melancholy was a catch-all type of term, and Edwards was, therefore, when he says that “Satan is particular successful with the melancholy,” meaning that he’s particularly successful with people who are mentally unstable, not necessarily institution cases, not needing confinement, not pathological or even paranoiac, but somewhat excessively disturbed mentally.

You take a modern term like manic depressive. Everybody goes through manic and depressive states, but a manic depressive is usually defined, incidentally that term I understand came into existence in 1899, Edwards was aware of things like that, but the
term didn’t exist and there was no psychiatric category such as that. But the point I’m making out here now as we define it today a manic depressive is really mentally sick because even though the stages up and down are natural and normal and everybody has them, some have them to such a degree that they can’t function according to the normal pattern and need special kind of treatment and remedies and so on. I’m trying to suggest here that melancholy as Edwards is using it here as a type of person who is particularly prone to satanic manipulation of his imagination covers a whole bracket of somewhat abnormal psychological behavior.

It was not, however, above Satan’s power to suggest ordinary ideas to ordinary persons. Satan is particularly active with persons in preparation for grace. Here’s Edwards the evangelist, you see, always concerned with the winning of souls to Jesus Christ, and he notices that Satan is equally concerned to prevent him or anyone else in trying to win souls to Jesus Christ, and Satan is particularly active with persons in preparation for grace. In a later lecture, I’m going to go into some detail of what Edwards means by preparation and seeking salvation. I can simply say, if you don’t always realize, this is certainly usually the first step in the direction of salvation. It may or may not issue in it, but because it could conceivably do so and may probably do so, Satan is especially agitated and concerned, and he uses it as an occasion to bring his seductive powers into play because he’s in danger now he realizes of losing one of his victims.

The devil can simulate even the order of religious experiences, as well as tempt persons when they are under actual conviction. I wish I had more time to develop this, but I’ll leave the hearer to his own imagination here to see what the possibilities could possibly be. With saints as well as others, Satan can suggest biblical texts as well as their misapplication, though he cannot awaken men’s consciences. You see that? Here’s Edwards, the master evangelist, a person who has studied—this is something I don’t think I have mentioned, but it’s frequently said that the two greatest psychologists of religious America have ever had are Jonathan Edwards and William James. William James and his variety of religious experiences dealing with typical religious experience, and [he] wasn’t a recognized expert in that area. [The work is The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study in Human Nature, 1902; various editions.] Jonathan Edwards is the prime researcher of Christian experience.
In my personal opinion, Jonathan Edwards is a better student of even normal religious experience than anybody else, including William James, but the general opinion gives that to James, but it's usually recognized that when it comes to understanding the nature of religious experience of a Christian sort, Edwards has no peer and so on. So here he's probing very deeply. He sees the devil as capable of and very much motivated toward action to nip the awakening in the bud, to prevent a person who is under conviction to start seeking God because of the danger that he might conceivably be found by God and so on, and at the same time that the devil uses all his stratagems to keep a person from even starting on the way that leads to eternal life, he is not able to awaken men's consciences and by inference he therefore can't deaden their consciences. He can mislead them, but he can neither awaken nor sedate their consciences. Edwards believed, as we shall see later, that the end of the first great awakening in Northampton (1734) was produced by satanic suggestions. This man [Joseph Hawley II, an uncle of Edwards], you know, and I mentioned before, heard this voice, “Cut your throat! Cut your throat!” And other people had heard the same thing, you see. It was pure imagination, but nevertheless because it was represented as if it were a voice from God, many people succumbed to satanic suggestion is Edwards's thought.

That the devil could be so clever in undoing revivals and yet so foolish in opposing God at the same time intrigued Jonathan Edwards. That the devil could be so wise in one way and so foolish in the other leads Edwards to remark, “To this I say, that although the devil be exceeding crafty and subtle, yet he is one of the greatest fools and blockheads in the world as the subtest of wicked men are.” The devil had more brains than any creature, and a creature that has more brains ought to know and acknowledge more immediately than all the rest of us that God is his maker and the worship and service of God is his supreme purpose in existence. And when he doesn’t do that, then he becomes what Edwards called “precisely because he is the greatest brain, he becomes the greatest blockhead.” And Edwards shows that there's a similar parallel with respect to the wise in this world. The more brainpower a human being has, if he does not acknowledge God, he is the greatest of fools.

Edwards continues, “Sin is of such a nature that it strangely infatuates and bewitches persons. [It] makes men deliberately choose eternal torments, rather than miss their pleasure of a few days and to esteem a little silver and gold above eternal
happiness. It makes men choose a few minutes pleasure though eternal flames be joined therewith, rather than the habit. Thus do the cunningness of wicked men. Sin has the same effect on the devils to make them act like fools, and so much the more as it is greater in them than in others. The devil acts not according to his deliberate judgment, but is driven on to his own inexpressible torment by the fruit of sin, malice, revenge, and pride.”

Here again I call your attention to the fact that in all of Edwards’s writings, he’s reflecting the fundamental principles of his theology. Here is the devil: absolutely evil, totally hostile to God, suffering the torments of the damned everlasting, and yet his brain still functioning. Greatest blockhead and at the same time the greatest genius ever created. The fall of the devils didn’t destroy the mind of the devils any more than the fall of man destroyed the minds of men. Edwards is assuming that as he goes along in this description of Satan. It is so entirely under the government of malice, the mind of Satan, that although he never attempted anything against God, but that he was disappointed, yet he cannot bear to lie still and refrain from exerting himself with all his might and subtlety against the interest of holiness. You would say when is this being going to learn something? The greatest of intelligence after centuries and centuries of unrelenting opposition to God in which he is ever-laughingly outwitted and constantly overcome, and he doesn’t learn a solitary thing even though he had the best equipment for learning of any creature who ever existed. So he, if he considered, might know that it will turn to his disadvantage.

The devil’s chief target is the godly. “The more he attacks them,” says Edwards, “the more he advances them. His very onslaught against their Redeemer brought their redemption. Now there is no enchantment, no witchcraft,” says Edwards, “can hurt them. No black arch can affect their happiness for ‘God holds Satan on a chain.’ Satan’s power is a ‘limited power.’ By nature he cannot create, he cannot search hearts, he cannot give life, he cannot give or prevent spiritual life through Christ. When a person is converted, he is out of Satan’s ultimate reach, for Christ is above the devils and the devils are left with nothing to do but tremble at the wrath of God.” Now you see that Satan’s blockhead role is most clearly revealed in his dreadful attack on the children of God, which dreadful attack that destroys millions of humans in hell only advances the growth and grace of the children of God.

Before we leave this subject, the apologetic of satanic power ought to be noted since it is of such interest in the church, greater than
in Edwards’s own time, his fundamental position was that Satan did not have supernatural power by which he could deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. In one of his earliest miscellanies, he went thoroughly into this point specifically with respect to having power to create life from the dead. It’s a fairly long quote with which I end this lecture, but it’s an important point contemporaneously, as I say, as well as in the understanding of Edwards’s theology.

“The union of a soul or spirit with matter, so as to produce a vital communication between them, being an arbitrary, that is determined, institution of divine wisdom and the laws of this connection being performed by voluntary and immediate divine efficacy, there being no reason or foundation in the separate nature of either substance why any motion in the body should produce any sensation at all in the will or any one more than another or why any action in the soul should produce any motion in the body” [and here’s Edwards summarizing his whole anthropology as he’s getting to another point, but this is his thorough way of going about things. He says, he continues], “it follows that when once that union is dissolved none but God Himself can restore it, seeing that the union depends on his arbitrary efficacy alone. And the laws of it are such as He has established and He only upholds, except we say that some creature has the management of the divine will and efficacy in his power.” Do you get what Edwards is saying there? Body and the soul are interrelation which, as far as natural reflection is concerned, couldn’t even exist, does exist, God has made it so, and God is the one who produces these interrelationships and to suppose that some creature had the management of that is an absurd thing, says Edwards.

Now I continue to his . . . “If we say the immortality of the soul and say that the soul is annihilated upon the death of the body does equally manifest that a resurrection must be God’s own work and His only, for the soul is certainly a distinct substance from the body, and it will be confessed that no creature can bring that substance from nothing again. No creature can do that.” So the devil he’s interested in especially . . . not even the devil. “Therefore, whatever may be supposed of other miracles, of the possibility of them being performed by creatures, we know of this that it cannot.” Edwards doesn’t think any of the others can be either, you understand, but what he’s trying to say couldn’t possibly be that a creature could create life and so on. And he said, and so he continues, “I can think if no other miracle whatever that would be so full an evidence and manifestation of the finger
of God, it must therefore be a certain evidence if the truth of that, that it is done in confirmation of, and especially the resurrection of the person Himself in proof of His own authority foretold by the person that He would rise and thereby give a demonstration of it. We’re seeing it must be done by God, as His resurrection, as we have shown, it is as incredible that should so extraordinary a favor to an imposter, that he should interpose his power to confirm a falsehood. Besides, when the person is dead there is an utter impossibility of cheating and juggling. If Christ-deceived person senses when he was alive, he sure did not when he was dead, which is juggling is at an end when they are dead.”

You see what Edwards is driving at here; the body and the soul come from God. Any relation is determined by God, and when their separation takes place, the body couldn’t possibly be brought to life again by any creature. God can enable a creature to raise the dead, as He has done, but only God could do that, is Edwards’s first point and God would never do that for an imposter. He would never do it for a liar. He would never do it for a devil who would try to use it to turn people away from God rather than to God. That isn’t all that Edwards has to say about what Warfield would call counterfeit miracles, but that is one of his fundamental observations as we conclude his study about the angels as they are established and confirmed by Jesus Christ and as they are fallen and confirmed by their own violation of the covenant of works and by their continued opposition and everlasting damnation as they fight fruitlessly and uselessly against the omnipotent God of ruling grace, even through Jesus Christ, our Lord.