

JANUARY 2004—*A Figment of the Imagination?*

Do you believe the devil is real or just a figment of the imagination? According to pollster George Barna, “the notion that Satan, or the Devil, is a real being who can influence people’s lives is regarded as hogwash by most Americans. Only one quarter (27%) strongly believe that Satan is real, while the majority argues that he is merely a symbol of evil.”<sup>1</sup>

Were C.S. Lewis alive today, he would regard our disbelief in the devil with dismay. “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”<sup>2</sup>

Lewis’s understanding of the devil was shaped by Holy Scripture. There we see that Satan deceived and seduced Eve to disobey God (Gen. 3), inflicted great harm upon Job and his family (Job 1-2), tempted Jesus (Mt. 4), and later inspired Judas to betray him. Knowing all of this, Peter urges believers to “...be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith...” (1 Pe. 5:8-9). And, Paul urges us to “put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood...” (Eph. 6:11).

“No reference to the Devil or devils is included in any Christian Creeds, and it is quite possible to be a Christian without believing in them. I do believe such beings exist, but that is my own affair. Supposing there to be such beings, the degree to which humans were conscious of their presence would presumably vary very much. I mean, the more a man was in the Devil’s power, the less he would be aware of it, on the principle that a man is still fairly sober as long as he knows he’s drunk. It is the people who are fully awake and trying hard to be good who would be most aware of the Devil.”<sup>3</sup>

Do you believe the devil is real? Are you fully awake to his schemes? Do you know how to resist his attacks? We could all benefit from more awareness of our enemy. Indeed, our spiritual health depends on it. C.S. Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* as a practical tool to help believers recognize and resist the devil’s schemes and attacks. Another excellent resource is *Powers of Darkness*, by Professor Clinton Arnold (InterVarsity Press), which provides a sound biblical theology that is very helpful.

*Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

Ephesians 6:11 NASB

<sup>1</sup> Barna Research Group, Ltd., *Religious Beliefs Vary Widely By Denomination*, June 25, 2001; Barna Research Online, [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org).

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Screwtape Letters*, HarperSanFrancisco, ©1942, Harper edition 2001, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis. *God in the Dock, “Answers to Questions on Christianity,”* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, ©1970 by The Trustees of the Estate of C.S. Lewis, pp. 56-57.