

Do Christians have the authority to rebuke the devil?

(The scriptural references are presented in the NET version of the Bible.
You may choose to use your own translation/version)

There are some Christians/Saints of God who believe they not only have the authority to rebuke the devil, but that they also have a duty to make it their business of continually rebuking him. To set the record straight, ***there is no biblical basis for such a belief, and neither is “binding” the devil.*** We do not find anywhere in Scripture that Christian’s were ever involved in rebuking or binding the devil. Let me say this as a caution: Don’t speak to Satan and say things like “*I bind you in Jesus’ name.*” That’s not biblical and not wise. We read of such a case of name dropping in ***Acts 19:13-16 (NET)*** ¹³ *But some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits, saying, “I sternly warn you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.”* ¹⁴ *(Now seven sons of a man named Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.)* ¹⁵ *But the evil spirit replied to them, “I know about Jesus and I am acquainted with Paul, but who are you?”* ¹⁶ *Then the man who was possessed by the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them all into submission. He prevailed against them so that they fled from that house naked and wounded.* You can’t bind Satan. Jesus can but you can’t, so pray to Jesus. In fact, He is the only person who personally rebuked the devil.

I believe the issue, the mistakes are made out of ignorance, in that most people really have no idea what they mean when they say it. We all tend to repeat words, phrases, and practices we've seen and heard in other Christians, who seem to be spiritually mature, especially in our prayers. But some of the words and practices we have heard in others are not always supported in the Bible. What I’m saying is this, some practices that have become commonplace among us in the church need to be questioned and stopped. “*Rebuking and binding the devil*” is one of them. And just because we include the words “*in the name of Jesus*” in our so-called rebuke doesn’t make it right or effective. The Bible alone is our standard for faith and practice. Every practice and tradition we follow must be founded and supported by, or at least not go against, the examples and commands we have received in the Word of God. This is one of the reasons why I so often encourage you when you begin reading through the whole Bible in a systematic way, that it must be taken in the proper context. The benefit is this, you will begin to discern what does and doesn’t line up with the Bible, and know which practices to receive and which to avoid at all cost.

So, let me first define what the word “*rebuke*” means. It is defined as “*to scold, blame or criticize in a sharp way.*” Which means in our vernacular “*to put someone in check.*” Matt Slick of Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry says, “*The concept of “binding Satan,” means to restrict the work of the devil. It*

means to cause him to have less ability, to decrease the power of, to prevent, his success. The phrase is used mostly in charismatic circles dealing with spiritual warfare where Christians, in prayer, ask the Lord to bind Satan in order to accomplish a spiritual good.” To think we can do that to Satan is to be prideful, arrogant, and conceited.

Satan, unlike God, is not omnipresent. He can only be in one place at a time, and the likelihood of him personally harassing individual Christians is very small. Satan is not omnipresent. In other words, he cannot be in all places at all times like God is. We may face spiritual attack from other evil spirits, but it is unnecessary to repeatedly rebuke the devil. He is certainly not directly involved in every attack against every Christian. Of course, he has legions of demons who do his bidding, and they are everywhere seeking to destroy the testimony of believers. And with that being said, what value is there in Satan just tempting any and every one, every average person. There is more effect *“if”* and when he can tempt and conquer those who are deeply rooted in the faith. But get this, anyone who has ever tried to pull up a tree, for instance, that has deep roots, will discover that it is nearly impossible to do so. And it should be noted here that the Christian cannot be possessed by a demon in the same way people in the Bible are described as being possessed. That is because when we are born again from above, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, (deeply rooted in us) and there are no more vacate rooms to rent!

As Christians, it is crucially important that we need to be aware of the reality of the presence of evil. As we struggle to stand firm in our faith, we must realize that our enemies are not merely human beings we can see, or ideas we can feel, or even entities we can touch. But there are real forces that come from the powers of darkness. Observe what the Bible says, ***Ephesians 6:12 (NET)*** ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.*

Now clearly, **God has allowed** Satan significant amounts of power and influence over the earth, at least for now, ***and this is always within God's sovereign control.*** Nevertheless, another question may pop in our minds; If God is sovereign, and all-powerful, why then does God allow Satan and the demons to attack us? To be completely honest, we are not given all the answers to this question, and no one knows the mind of God except His Son and the Holy Spirit, but Scripture does make certain things clear. First, it is not God's desire for Satan to attack people. When God does allow Satan or his demons to attack a person, He has His reasons and or purposes for it. Sometimes, God allows demonic temptation as a test. We see this evidenced when Jesus was tested by Satan in the desert (**Matthew 4:1-10**). Jesus, unlike Adam, passed the test.

Another reason God might allow Satan or his demons to attack us is to build our maturity. To do this, it requires total dependence on God through much prayer and the study and use of the Word of God. And then there are other times, the Lord allows testing so we can be a comfort to others later. **2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NET)** ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ⁴ *who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.* ⁵ *For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow toward us, so also our comfort through Christ overflows to you.*

Satan, in a sense is on a short leash, therefore, he is unable to make a move at God's children unless the Lord allows it. Remember the situation with Job? Job did not see why God allowed Satan to attack him (Job 1:12), because never told him, and yet God used the situation to stop Satan's boasts and to bring glory to the Lord. Satan had to have specific permission for the things he was allowed to do; and even then, the Lord put boundaries around Job, of which Satan called "*a hedge.*" (Job 1:10).

In Luke 22:28-32, Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to sift you like wheat. What we do not understand in that situation, is in the Greek text, it is that Satan's desire was to sift all of the disciples. The word "*you*" in verse 31 is in the plural. Watch the text: ³¹ *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded* (to demand successfully the surrender of), *to sift* (expresses a demand claimed by the satan (and granted to him?) *that he may sift* (Simon and his companions as wheat); *you* (plural) *like wheat,* ³² *but I have prayed for you* (singular), *that your* (singular) *faith may not fail. And you* (singular), *when once you have turned back,* ("to turn one's attention to," "to take up a matter," "to pay regard to," "to note," "to be intent on," *strengthen your brothers.*"

Ten times the word "*you*" is used in these four verses, however, they are not all the same Greek word. The emphasis is this, although the satan wanted all of the Lord's disciples, Jesus wanted them more, and therefore, protected and instructed them to stay true to the task he would assign them.

Though Satan would try, he couldn't destroy God's children. Therefore, take also a lesson from the spiritual life of Paul the apostle, **2 Corinthians 12:6-9 (NET)** ⁶ *For even if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I would be telling the truth; but I refrain from this so that no one may regard me beyond what he sees in me or what he hears from me,* ⁷ *even because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me--so that I would not become arrogant.* ⁸ *I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me.* ⁹ *But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.*

And yet, even when we have no clear answers to explain why God allows Satan or his demons to attack, we still must never forget this exhortation and truth from the apostle Paul: **Romans 8:27-39 (NET)** ²⁷ *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's will.* ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,* ²⁹ *because those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.* ³⁰ *And those God predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.* ³¹ *What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things?* ³³ *Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies;* ³⁴ *Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died (and more than that he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us.* ³⁵ *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written, "For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!* ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Bible tells us that Satan prowls around like a lion in search of prey, looking for victims to devour, observe, however, the command that proceeds the statement: **1 Peter 5:8 (NET)** ⁸ ***Be sober and alert.** Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.* And sadly, there are countless thousands who have not been sober or alert and have been devoured because they thought they could challenge or even control him. The question is, how are you going to fight, challenge, or contend with that of which you can't see? Satan is the power at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. We can only see the evidence of his presence. And there was a time when, before we were saved by Christ, as we see in **Ephesians 2:2 (NET)** ² *in which you formerly lived according to this world's present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience.* Anyone who is not under the control of the sovereign God is under the control of the devil (Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Born-again Christians are no longer enslaved to Satan or to sin (Romans 6:6-7), but this does not mean we are immune to the **temptations** that he puts before us. And the Bible, again, truthfully tells us the main reason for that is this, **James 1:14 (NET)** ¹⁴ ***But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.*** That means that the Satan capitalizes on the fallen condition of our sin nature.

The Bible does not give Christians the authority to rebuke the devil, but to resist

him. It (the Bible), gives this directive in *James 4:7 (NET)* ⁷ So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. Also, observe closely, what Zechariah tells us, *Zechariah 3:2 (NET1)* ² The LORD said to Satan, "May the LORD rebuke you, Satan! May the LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn't this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Even Michael, one of the most powerful of the angels (an archangel), did not dare to accuse Satan, but rather we are told, *Jude 1:9 (NET)* ⁹ But even when Michael the archangel was arguing with the devil and debating him concerning Moses' body, he did not dare to bring a slanderous judgment, but said, "May the Lord rebuke you!" So, therefore, in response to Satan's attacks, a Christian should quickly appeal to Christ and His Word. Instead of focusing on defeating the devil, we should focus on following Christ and trusting that He will defeat the forces of evil. Spending unnecessary time on correcting, challenging, or confronting the devil, is counterproductive, we should do as this text says, *Hebrews 12:2 (NET)* ² keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Now here is this caveat; we must learn to discern what are truly attacks from Satan, and what are simply the results of our sins or ungodly lifestyle that are happening to us.

Further, it is not necessary for a Christian to rebuke Satan because God has given us His **full** armor to **stand** against evil. Here is what the Bible says, *Ephesians 6:10-18 (NET)* ¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. ¹³ For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, ¹⁶ and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end being alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints.

The truth is the most effective weapons we have against the devil are our faith, wisdom, and knowledge about God and His Word. Just think about it, Christ, when tempted by Satan, (tested, Jesus has no sin nature, so He cannot be succumb to temptation as we do) answered him with Scripture. *Matthew 4:1-11 (NET)* ¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to

the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you' and 'with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"⁷ Jesus said to him, "Once again it is written: 'You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.'"⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. ⁹ And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.

To gain victory in spiritual matters, we must maintain a clear conscience and have control over our thoughts. *2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NET)* ³ *For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards; ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments ⁵ and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.*

Our protection from the enemy does not come by our wielding the name of Jesus fiercely or boldly at Satan, but from running to our Lord and hiding under the shadow of the Almighty! Check out what *Ps. 91:1-7* says. In fact, as I've previously stated, we're told to submit to God, resist the devil (by refusing to give into his temptations and harassments) and humble ourselves, submitting to God. As we do this, we are resisting the devil and he must flee. As we draw near to God, He draws near to us. That includes confession and forsaking sin, sorrowing over sin, and humbly trusting in the Lord—who will lift us up. We are reassured that though we may suffer awhile, the God of all grace will establish, perfect, and strengthen us. Jesus said, *John 10:27-28 (NET)* ²⁷ *My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. Colossians 1:13 (NET)* ¹³ *He (God) delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves.* We have the blessed assurance that the battle is the Lord's! His omnipotence and deliverance is by His work on the cross as promised in His Word. All we need to do is get close to Him. So, why would I even try to personally pick at the devil, when my Lord, Savior, and the Father have already assured me that the battle is Theirs, not mine; and They will be faithful to keep me? Even in the face of temptation, persecution and all the demons, we will never perish!

Rebuking the devil is God's job, not ours. It is neither commanded us, nor given to us as an example of normal Christian warfare. Instead let us turn to God, resist Satan, and focus our eyes on the Christ, our Protector. There is a line in William Cowper's poem entitled *Exhortation To Prayer* that says, "Satan trembles when

*he sees, The weakest saint upon his knees.”*⁷ So, therefore, we don't need to command him, bind him, or rebuke him.

Finally, remember the devil's end. While the devil may cause problems in our world today, he is not permitted to operate freely in the world forever. Scripture is abundantly clear regarding the future judgment of Satan, and he will have some company. In fact, the only thing he will do forever is found in **Revelation 20:10 (NET)** ¹⁰ *And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever.*

There is no doubt Satan is powerful, and we don't argue that point, but again, we must never forget his power does not compare with Almighty God in any form or fashion. When we as believers are filled with God's Spirit, which occurs at salvation, and then diligently strive to draw near to the Lord, Satan has no power or authority apart from the permission of God Himself. We need not fear, nor bind, nor seek to rebuke Satan. God already has Satan under His control. Our focus is to draw near to God and rely on His great power.

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