

Do You Have The “Fuddle” Virus?

by Bill Moller

Recently, I spent hours – actually days – eradicating a virus from a computer. Despite the presence of a fully updated antivirus/antispymware protection system, this pest snuck through. You might wonder how this was possible. The method was ingenious, but simple – the designer, insidious. This cunning attack counted on the likelihood that the user of the computer would be distracted, allowing the infection to take place right before the user’s eyes and with his or her full cooperation.

I spend a good deal of my working hours handling issues similar to the one described above. As a network administrator I’m trained in what to look for, and my antennae are always up and searching for suspicious prompts and distractions while surfing the Internet or reading email. In addition, because I know what is likely to occur at any given moment while using a computer, I can usually spot a wolf in sheep’s clothing well before most people realize they are in the presence of fake fur.

As noted earlier, the designers of these binary invaders are insidious – cunning. They have discovered over the years that a full frontal assault of mutating code is relatively easy to spot and defend against. Look in your email SPAM folder at the messages piling up and you’ll see evidence of that. The overtly destructive viruses are short-lived and while the potential for catastrophic infections still exist, the designers have realized more can be gained through stealth than by strong-arming.

Some of the latest approaches have evolved into what I like to call “Eddie Haskell” mode. You may recall the character of Eddie Haskell from the 50’s TV show “Leave it to Beaver”. Eddie was a scoundrel who would suddenly stand up straight, smile and sweet-talk Mrs. Cleaver whenever she entered the room, and then immediately revert to nasty mode when the coast was clear. The 50’s were a simpler time, but Eddie’s thinly veiled strategy was obvious even back then.



In the old traveling medicine shows hucksters would sell “snake oil”, making wildly false claims. They would then quickly high-tail it for the next town in search of their next victims. Thankfully, the days of the fast talking salesman are long gone, but the deceiver’s ruse has become much more sophisticated. Today, retailers bundle printers into computer packages, knowing that will guarantee ongoing business in their ink, paper and accessories markets. And, like good little consumers, we buy and buy and buy, oblivious to the fact that despite spending ten times the purchase price on the extras, we still can’t get the pictures out of the camera and onto the paper.

The virus infections we’re seeing these days smile just like Eddie, but are poised to pounce at the first opportunity to begin their carefully disguised, always destructive tasks. They pop up as warning messages, posing as friendly assistants ready to offer help or informing you of impending troubles. They look authentic, but under that false exterior they are hoping you’ll believe their lies and take the bait. Once you invite them in they can setup shop and begin gathering bank account numbers and the email addresses of their next victims. The only thing you may notice is the sluggish behavior of your computer and the sudden influx of SPAM.

On a daily basis examples of slick schemes are presented right before our eyes, and we often fail to notice. Consider those television shows which, under the guise of allowing you to voice your opinion, encourage you to vote a contestant in or out by “texting” to a particular number. The phone companies rack up the profits, pennies at a time, from millions of unsuspecting participants who gain little from their efforts.

Recently, we all watched the corporate moguls pleading their cases before Congress, excusing away mistakes and failures while holding out their hands in expectation of receiving someone else’s money. There were many attempts to redirect our focus, by most everyone involved.

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The deception and political slight-of-hand was evident on both sides of the aisle and continued all the way out the door and right into the press reports. Smoke and mirrors were everywhere. Someone was very busy pointing fingers here and stirring up trouble there.

In his 1970 hit “Beware of Darkness”, George Harrison unveiled this subtle deception. The third verse puts it well:

*Watch out now,
Take care,
Beware of soft shoe shufflers,
Dancing down the sidewalks,
As each unconscious sufferer,
Wanders aimlessly,
Beware of Maya.*

George Harrison was deeply steeped in Eastern religious beliefs where “Maya” denotes illusion or deception. Simply taken, he is warning us against the Eddie Haskell of our day – those “soft shoe shufflers”. And, he points to the “unconscious sufferers” who “wander aimlessly” as a result of the deceptions. Consider your friends and coworkers who move about in either a fog or a frenzy, but never seem to be able to clear the air or calm their situation. Let's be clear. It's not only the “deceivers” in our culture who should concern us. There is a far more subtle, dangerous and persistent threat.

In the Bible we read that the ultimate “deceiver” is Satan. In chapter 12 of the book of Revelation, the apostle John notes the following: “...the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world...”. While, on the other hand, in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus is called the “Truth”. Clearly polar opposites.

Most of us probably have an image of Satan that includes scorching fire, severe pain and disturbing horror. I'm quite sure there are individuals who will testify to Linda Blair (The Exorcist) types of demonic possessions, but Satan himself has shifted tactics much the way our virus coding crooks have redesigned their villainous products. The Devil has found that simply distracting us – shifting our attention – can keep us confused for days, weeks, months. We can be so

distracted that our most noble and enduring efforts can be postponed for years, or simply forgotten. He has even discovered how to sap our energies by allowing us to participate in causes that have good intentions but accomplish very little - making us unproductive - too exhausted to seek the truth and work toward making a real impact

We are exposed to this very concept in C. S. Lewis' literary collection known as “The Screwtape Letters” – a fictional series of letters from one of Satan's senior tempters to a junior tempter stationed on earth. Screwtape, writes about how the junior tempter is to redirect his human “patient” and distract him with the “stream” of events passing him by:

Your business is to fix his attention on the stream. Teach him to call it "real life" and don't let him ask what he means by "real."... Keep pressing home on him the ordinariness of things... Do remember you are there to fuddle him.

In this quote we get a little taste of how Satan might “fuddle” – distract – us with the things of life, all the time keeping our focus off important questions and issues. We worry about our comfort, or how to compete in the social scene. We have to have the latest gadget or the hottest fashion. We're not satisfied with being able to drive to work in a warm (or cool) car, we have to be able to talk on the phone at the same time our GPS is shouting directions for us to follow. It isn't enough that our kids play soccer and do well in school. They have to learn the piano, study Tae Kwan Doe, raise money for the marching band, attend SAT prep classes, volunteer as a junior mentor, and get straight A's so they can go to an Ivy League school, where the onslaught continues and intensifies.

A profound saying being tossed around lately goes like this: “What you focus on determines what you miss.” If you and I are focused on avoiding computer viruses, and we see a message pop up that says “You are at risk...”, our first instinct might be to respond to that message hoping to gain insight and protection, while never considering that the message might be bogus. If Satan keeps us focused on the plethora of social, academic and



family tasks to which we have convinced ourselves to be obligated, who knows what we may be missing.

Brian McLaren, quoting a mentor of his, applies this concept in relation to biblical studies. He writes about how we are trained to look for certain things in the Bible, and as a result of our focus on those specifics we miss other aspects of Scripture.

A classic example of this can be seen around the Christmas season. How many of us place the statues of the Three Kings at the Manger? We assume the traveling Wise Men journeyed across the deserts to the stable and left their gifts at the foot of the baby Jesus, lying in the feeding trough. But that may not have been the case. In Matthew chapter 2 we read about many things that took place as the Magi approached Jerusalem – their meeting with Herod, the gathering of the chief priests and scribes, the calculation of when the star appeared, and their arrival at the “house”. Then we read about Herod ordering the death of all the boys “two years old and younger”. It seems that the star that appeared and the angel’s announcement of the birth of Jesus may have occurred as much as two years before the visitors from the East arrived. How did we miss that? What else have we overlooked in Scripture?

Satan counts on our limited ability to shift our focus. He knows that he can easily distract us with shiny objects, and that we will happily remain preoccupied for extended periods while life passes us by. Those shiny objects may have been toys when we were young, or girls or boys, or cars as we grew older, or maybe money and power for some of us, or comfort or leisure for others. Satan doesn’t care as long as we stay distracted.

“Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up...”

(1 Peter 5:9-10a, The Message)

The Devil may patiently wait for helpless, hapless chuckleheads like me to wander into his snare, but God has the upper hand. The Lord knows me well, because He “...formed my inward parts; ...wove me in my mother's womb.” (Psalm 139: 13) If you’ve built

something from the ground up, you can’t help but be aware of your creation’s strengths and weaknesses, and you know how much stress can be applied, and where gentleness is needed. Now, the Devil didn’t create us and only responds to our reactions, but he learns quickly and is very observant. He spots our weak areas and turns them to his advantage.



One area of weakness for some is the belief that “busy” is better. This subtle lie of Satan fits seamlessly into the cry of our culture. It doesn’t matter whether we’re talking about being busy in a charity, a ministry, your family, or work. Busy is not synonymous with productive. We want to be productive in all we do, but we do not have to be busy all the time. Efficient use of time and energy is essential. We are exhorted in Scripture to be “good stewards” of what God has given us. However, the Devil likes to twist this concept as well. Consider this simple exercise in combating our bent toward busyness. Next time someone asks “How are you?”, resist the temptation to answer “Busy!” Instead, keep two images in mind: (1) the White Rabbit from Alice in Wonderland – “No time to say hello, good bye, I’m late, I’m late, I’m late!”; (2) The Tortoise from The Tortoise & the Hare – “Slow and steady wins the race.” Satan, appealing to our sense of sophistication, would have us believe that these are outdated or purely whimsical tales. In reality, they speak truths that cannot be denied.

On my website (www.ThinkingChristians.org) I try to point visitors to a broad cross-section of speakers, authors and resources. I have some rather conservative sources listed alongside a number of quite liberal ones. Some of the material is profound and heady while other features are strictly whimsical or intended to point toward beauty rather than theory. I post this diverse set of resources to alter our focus, because “what you focus on determines what you miss.” It is my hope that reviewing a variety of material will break our focus just long enough to help shed light on what we’re missing.

A typical objection to Christianity is the false belief that it is based on a set of outdated rules. While those who hold this objection often focus on the Ten Commandments and usually point to adultery, and

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coveting, and idols, they often miss how Jesus refocused his followers on the primacy of just two commands:

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

If we are keeping those two commands – I mean truly trying to love the Lord and our neighbor – adultery, and coveting and false idols will be shown for what they are, distractions from the “Truth” – diversions that keep us from loving our spouses, our children, our friends, yes, and even our enemies.

Eugene Peterson phrases the famous passage in Scripture nicely:

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

(John 3:16-17, The Message)



Don't let the “fuddle” virus set up shop in your life. Refocus on what is “real”, even if Uncle Screwtape keeps trying to point you to the stream of "missed opportunities" hustling past you . Don't let the distractions of this world keep you from showing the love God displayed through his gift to you and me.

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Related Sources:

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