

Satan (Part 2)

Satan, Our Enemy: Understanding Satan's Modus Operandi

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 19-Sep-92; Sermon #039

In last week's sermon, we saw that we have powerful, cunning, and (I might say) implacable enemies that are large in number. They are invisible. They are supernatural. They are occupying seats of authority over this earth to which they are restrained. Our spiritual struggle is largely with them and it is our responsibility to overcome them, even as Jesus overcame Satan.

We also saw that the struggle is actually weighted in our favor on the basis of four things:

1. The good angels far outnumber the bad. There is at least a 2:1 ratio.
2. The demons greatly fear God. They tremble before Him.
3. They are a house divided. They cannot get their act together. This is certainly reflected in society when we understand that the governments of man are very largely influenced by these unseen, spiritual powers that are actually ruling over the nations. The nations are at one another's throats and they cannot get along with one another. They are simply reflecting the driving spirits behind them.
4. Most important of all is that God has set limits as to what they can do, as the book of Job clearly shows. Remember that Satan complained that God had set a hedge about Job and therefore Job was protected. God has done pretty much the same thing for you and me.

Today we are going to begin to look into the ploys Satan uses in his warfare. I use the term warfare because I want to emphasize that we, whether we realize it or not, have been thrust into a desperate struggle brought on by our calling from God.

Think about this: We are the heirs of salvation; our inheritance is the earth. But this earth just so happens to be the first estate of the original inhabitants—angels who have become demons. They look upon us as invaders and they are going to defend it even though God has already judged them as disqualified because of their behavior.

We are intruders into their space. Now, it is not really their space, it is ours. But they are acting like it is still theirs. God has not seen fit to get them out yet. We know from prophecy that it is going to occur, but they are still here, we are also here, and there is only so much territory to go around. They do not want us here, but we want to be here. Obviously, that is going to lead to clashes.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

We are not carrying on a "worldly" war, but the battle for us is no less real. We have got to understand that we are not fighting for material success, earthly power, or prestige. We are not even trying to make our enemies look bad. The real issue for our life is the victory or defeat of God's purpose for us.

We have to understand that we have merciless, implacable, and powerful spiritual enemies, so that such things as human cleverness, ingenuity, organizing ability, eloquent arguments, reliance on charm, or forcefulness of personality, are simply not the answer. Those things may impress men, but believe me, demons are not impressed at all. Those things are the weapons of carnality.

The good news is that the Captain of our salvation has already defeated their Goliath. Their leader is defeated. He is beaten and the Captain of our salvation lives in us.

We find from these verses that the enemy invades our mind, our imagination, and he does this with opinions, with convictions, and feelings that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. The words that are used in verse 5 in the New King James are "casting down arguments." Some Bibles say "reasoning." Others say "convictions" or "opinions." We could even inject here "feelings." Whatever the application is, they exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

These things that they invade our mind with are designed to affect or alter our behavior. That is what Satan did in the Garden of Eden. The reasonings are the key to understanding. God created you and me with the ability to reason. But what line of reason do we follow? The key to following the right line of reasoning is this phrase, "against the knowledge of God," because the thoughts that invade our mind coming from this evil, wicked, subtle, deceitful spiritual leader are going to lead us to exalt our reasoning against the knowledge of God.

This knowledge is not primarily *about* God, but rather the knowledge *of the person* of God. The knowledge about God is certainly included, but what he wants to exalt our thoughts about is the knowledge of the person of God.

Why would he want to do that? Because we have a relationship with a person—He is a being with personality, character, and a wonderful wholesome way of life that produces every good thing. Satan tries to destroy that relationship by getting us to doubt either the Person and His goodness or the rightness and goodness of His promises and way of life.

II Corinthians 2:11 Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

I think it is the King James that translates devices as "wiles." We will use some synonyms so that we get a clearer grasp. We could also translate

devices or wiles as "contrivances, techniques, stratagems, plans, procedures, plottings, or schemes." He has devices; he has ways that are designed to achieve a particular goal.

A device, stratagem, technique, or contrivance might be thought of as being a tool made to carry out a certain function. But in this context (remembering what we just read in II Corinthians 10) the implication is that the device is primarily mental.

Now indeed they are. He is clever. He is crafty. He is the possessor of ingenious subtlety, but he also has a *modus operandi* that presents us with clues as to his influence and tends to give him away so that it can render much of his cleverness inoperative and make him easier to defeat.

The idea is to catch him as he is beginning to use his device, twisting us mentally to the line of reasoning that he wants us to follow. If we can catch it as it begins, we will not be entrapped by it. We know that Adam and Eve did not catch it and as a result they were led astray.

One of a Christian's primary defenses against Satan of course has to be a prior awareness of his *modus operandi*, particularly—I might say right in this context here—his evil desire to turn good into evil. Perhaps no cunning could be more devilish than to do such a thing. But right in this context, Paul is alluding that Satan can get a person through a spiritual quality that is good.

II Corinthians 2:6-8 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man [The punishment was that the man was disfellowshipped, excommunicated. However, he had repented.], so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

When you put that together with verse 11, what Paul is saying is that a godly sorrow unto repentance can actually give Satan the opportunity to turn this person's feelings about his sin into an abnormal self-pity, which will destroy that despairing person's relationship with the church and with God by turning that person into a bitter cynic. Satan is that clever.

It does not end there. In addition to that, he can turn the righteous indignation of those who were offended by the man's sin originally into a bitter self-righteousness if they do not forgive and forget and go on. So he gets people going and coming unless they are aware that he is able to turn something that is good into a ploy by which he destroys that person's relationship with God and with the church.

These are not the only weapons that Satan has in his arsenal. Remember that we are involved in a war and in warfare. A general will employ every kind of ploy, device, tool, or contrivance to rout the enemy. A general will use decoys, infiltration, subversion, propaganda, rumors, misleading leaks of information, and sometimes a frontal attack with diversions on the flanks.

Now Satan is no different, but we are especially warned of his *subtlety*. He creates distractions and illusions to deflect us from reaching our goal. He has the ability to make things that are in God's purpose unimportant—such as material things or vanity—seem important, while eternal, spiritual things he makes seem unimportant, unnecessary, and unrealistic.

This knowledge of what he is like would be unnecessary if he could not affect us after baptism. Despite his earlier defeat at the hand of God and, I might also add to this, his defeat by our David, Jesus Christ, he is still seeking to destroy God. Even if he fails at that, he still wants to destroy God's purpose of having us inherit His Kingdom. Now, how?

Let us go back to I John 4. Satan's major public effort is through what we call today *disinformation*. He also uses attitudes, but for the purpose of this sermon, we are mostly going to be concentrating on disinformation. Disinformation is a lie that is plausible enough on the surface, it seems as though it might be true.

One of John's methods of teaching is to present contrasts by which one can see the truth and make right decisions. He uses terms and contrasts such as the evil one against God, or the spirit of error against truth, or the false prophet (the anti-Christ) against the true.

The context at the beginning of chapter 4 is false prophets. There is a great deal of information against false prophets, as there should be, because they are the ones through whom Satan gives his lies most of the time.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the anti-Christ, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

The definition of a prophet is simply "one who speaks for another." You might recall in the book of Exodus that God designated Moses as His prophet. In other words, Moses was going to speak for God. A little bit later (believe it or not), Moses was designated as God before Pharaoh, and Aaron was Moses' prophet.

The indication here is that the prophet was going to have words given to him by another that he was then going to speak before those to whom he was sent. In the case where Moses was appointed as God before Pharaoh, Moses would say the words to Aaron and then Aaron in turn would say the words to Pharaoh. We have Moses putting the words into Aaron's mouth and Aaron then speaking them to Pharaoh.

Put that back into I John 4. The unspoken implication in I John 4:1-3 is that the prophet is inspired or motivated by one for whom he speaks. At the beginning of verse 1, John literally says in the Greek, "Stop believing every spirit." Now wait a minute. I have not had any spirits speaking to me. Have you?

We have to understand the way in which John used the word "spirit." I do not know whether you are aware, but the word "spirit" is used eight different ways in the Bible. According to *Thayer's Lexicon* in this context it refers to, "One in whom a spirit is manifest or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit whether divine or demonical."

These spirits then, in this context, are thus human beings actuated by demons or the Holy Spirit of God. It could be either. These spirits that John is talking about would be the teachers, the pastors, or the evangelists who were circulating around the local churches of God. I want you to notice these anti-Christ—these false prophets—were speaking to the congregations of the true church. That is clear right in the context.

The exhortation to you and me and to those people in that day is that they were to test whether these spirits are so. It is a positive testing just like was given to the Bereans in the book of Acts. They tested whether these things were so.

He is saying to these people, "Don't treat the teacher—the preacher, the pastor, the evangelist—as a heretic until he shows himself to be one." But they are supposed to put the person to the test. We have to take this advice because John's powerful warning here is that though the inspired teacher or speaker is the means by which the revelation, or the word, or the preaching comes, we must know that the supernatural one behind that speaker may not be divine.

The spirit is revealed by the message or the doctrine of the prophet. Remember *Thayer's* definition. I will quote that to you again. "Spirit refers to one in whom a spirit is manifest [it is a human being] or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit whether divine or demonical." It is up to you and me to make the test as to whether this person is speaking the truth.

We are going to go back to Deuteronomy, because I want you to see this is exactly parallel to what God warned through Moses in chapter 13. God expects His people to be as well informed as they possibly can be from His Word and to use His Word to evaluate what they are being taught.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . .

Do you see what is coming out of the prophet's mouth? Something that is false. Who is that prophet speaking for—what spirit, what supernatural spirit? It is not the Spirit of God, but rather it is a demon speaking through a human being, inspiring and motivating that person. God is permitting it and He expects His people to put that person to the test.

Deuteronomy 13:3-5 . . . or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you [Does that not line right up with Satan's devices?] from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst."

This is serious business, brethren, very serious business as the context here shows very clearly. The important thing is to see that God expects us to be able to discern who the spirit is that is motivating the speaker. The test is to see whether we will remain loyal to God—loyal in terms of keeping His commandments.

What that means is that the listener better have a pretty good working knowledge of God—knowledge of God takes us right back to II Corinthians 10:5, where Paul warned that the reasonings will exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. It is beginning to become very clear the devices that Satan is going to use to turn us aside. It is also beginning to become very clear what we need to be able to thwart those devices. We need to have a good working knowledge of God—not things *about* God so much (that is certainly included), but the knowledge *of God the Person*, the Being, with whom we have a relationship.

Also here, Deuteronomy confirms that these false prophets (some of them, but not all of them) will be able to do miracles, which is what Paul

confirmed in II Thessalonians 2, which is also what John confirmed in Revelation 13. We see that what is in the New Testament is built upon what God had already showed in the Old Testament—that the *modus operandi* is going to be something that is carried through from one covenant to the other.

We have to understand that such signs—the ability to do miracles—are not of themselves indications of authority from God. What they do must be combined with teaching that is in agreement with God's already revealed will.

One final group of scriptures to show you how serious this is in the eyes of God, we will read just a little bit further. Look at how close these relationships are.

Deuteronomy 13:6-9 "If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him."

It is serious business.

Let us go to Jeremiah 14. I am going to be reading a great deal from the first sixteen verses from this chapter, because I want to show you why this is so important to God. We want to see what the effect of turning away from God through the acceptance of a message from a false minister might be. There are other chapters that I could have used, but I think this is abundantly clear.

Jeremiah 14:1 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts.

Look at what is happening. The land is suffering from a drought. Do you think the people connected drought with obedience to the message of a false minister? I do not think they did.

Jeremiah 14:2-6 "Judah mourns, and her gates languish; they mourn for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up. Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water. They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads. Because the ground is parched, for there was no rain in the land, the plowmen were ashamed; they covered their heads. Yes, the deer also gave birth in the field, but left because there was no grass. [Wildlife is affected.] And the wild donkeys stood in the desolate heights; they sniffed at the wind like jackals; their eyes failed because there was no grass."

Jeremiah 14:7-9 O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against You. O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, why should You be like a stranger in the land [God's far off], and like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should You be like a man astonished?

Jeremiah 14:10-14 Thus says the Lord to this people: "Thus they have loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins." Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry". . . . Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.'" And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them. . . ."

The spirit that was speaking to them was not divine. It was supernatural though. The people submitted to it because they did not put the prophet to the test to see whether or not his teaching was in harmony with what had already been revealed through God's messenger Moses.

Jeremiah 14:14-16 ". . . they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land'; By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword [It was going to get worse. They were going to be invaded.]; they will have no one to bury them [you might say the ultimate in shame], them nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters, for I will pour their wickedness on them."

God blames the plight of the nation on the false prophets who were listened to. What did they do? They lulled the people into complacency, which led them to believe that all was well when it was not well. They preached to them smooth things because the people had itching ears. They liked the things that were taught to them, but it was not the Word of God. God says they were lies given in His name. If one listens to them, then it is the same thing as the blind leading the blind and they both fall in the ditch.

Let us go back to Matthew 7. Here we are right in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus warns:

Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

The description here is very apt—wolves in sheep's clothing, that is, they appear on the outside to be something they are not. I am convinced that when Jesus uttered this He was thinking of the church and false ministers who would be, in the future—that is, from the time of Jesus—insinuating themselves into the church by appearing to be sheep within the sheepfold.

Jesus used that terminology in regard to His relationship with the church. He is the Shepherd; we are His sheep. Here we have wolves (false ministers)

who look like sheep, but it is hypocrisy. They only look that way on the outside.

He tells us we will know them by their fruits. The fruit that is produced is not something that necessarily will appear very quickly. But Christ guarantees that over a period of time the church will be stripped of its true spiritual vitality in terms of the character that will be produced within the flock.

What is He saying? The implication is (right in the context) that Jesus is connecting belief with practice. You believe a certain set of doctrines and you are going to practice something because of the teaching. Another way of putting it might be connecting creed, that is, the religious creed or the dogma that a group is following, will produce a certain kind of conduct by the people. Belief and practice, creed and conduct—Jesus is saying here they are vitally connected. In other words, the teacher cannot hide what he is going to produce. Eventually it will come out.

Their false philosophies, no matter how attractive at first sight they may appear, will in the long run be exposed for what they really are. That is why I read those verses in the New Testament. All I did was leap from the warning in Deuteronomy 13 to just one series of verses that clearly show the effect of following the teaching of a false prophet.

The land was in drought. How many people would carnally connect a drought with obedience to a false minister? Not very many people would do that because those people would be thinking carnally anyway and they would say, "It's just part of the cycle of things. It happens every so many years." They are not thinking that there might be a spiritual cause to it, that God is concerned about the well-being of His people, that He had brought the drought in order to make them think about why this is happening, and the cause for concern is spiritual in nature.

Do you think any of the presidential candidates here in the United States are going to make an appeal to the United States' citizens that the cause of our problems in the United States is spiritual in nature? The closest they dare come is this flap over family values.

If President Bush or candidate Clinton said before a group of people that the reason we are having troubles in the United States is that we need to repent and get back to our God, they would be laughed into shame and contempt. The reason we are seeing the immorality in the United States is the effect of listening to false ministers!

For those of us who believe God, we can make the connection easily. My point here is not to point the finger of scorn at Americans or Canadians or anybody else, because we understand their disobedience and Satan deceives them. My concern is that Satan does not trip us up by falling into the trap.

I think we need to examine, just briefly, what Jesus was talking about here in terms of what the false minister would not preach. He does not explicitly say what their teaching will be. But brethren, look where this was placed by Matthew and I have to believe God inspired Matthew to remember what Jesus' words were right after He uttered that thing in verse 12—which is the golden rule. Verse 13 admonishes us to:

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

That leads right into the teaching about false prophets. To me, reading that right in its context, I would have to say that what Jesus said about false ministers demands that the false ministers will neither acknowledge or teach the narrow way that leads to life; the narrow way that is going to lead to persecution. Instead they will do just what God shows the Old Testament false prophets did and teach "peace, peace"—the smooth, easy, and broad way.

In other words, "You don't have to make any sacrifices in your obedience to God." I think that it is so interesting that in the last five or six years in the church so many things have been liberalized. Do you think we are getting away from the straight and the narrow, the difficult and the sacrificial way?

With that in mind, let us go back to II Corinthians 11. We will continue with the context that we began the sermon with. After mentioning Satan in chapter 10, Paul opens chapter 11 with:

II Corinthians 11:1-2 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

We are going to begin to see here that Paul's concern was that these people would be led aside, deceived by Satan, away from their spiritual purity. They would lose their chastity. They would begin fornicating, spiritually fornicating, with the world.

II Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds [remember arguments, reasonings] may be corrupted from the simplicity [the straight, the narrow] that is in Christ.

Here we are beginning a section that must be the ultimate of not being what one appears outwardly to be. My reference is to the wolves in sheep's clothing, to false prophets or false ministers, but here the title used is apostle instead of prophet, but the sense is the same.

Paul is not speaking about a prophet who foretells the future, but simply a minister (an apostle, he calls them) who speaks under inspiration. He, like the apostle John, is warning the Corinthians that the inspiration may not be coming from God.

It seems pretty clear that the teaching of these false prophets, false ministers, and false apostles, is right inside the church. That is kind of mind boggling, but these people are hearing them. Paul's fear is that they might be diverted from the simplicity. His fear is well-grounded, because Satan is always there and there is therefore the possibility of attack—an attack against our single-hearted devotion to Christ.

Remember the parable Jesus gave of the sower and the seed? The sower went forth to sow. He cast his seeds out, and some of them fell in reasonably good ground. Others fell on stony ground. But in at least a couple of cases, the seed germinated, took root, and then things began to happen. In one case it was the cares of the world, another the deceitfulness of riches, and another the lust of other things entered in and they choked the words.

Those things of and by themselves are not sin, but they can be turned into means, contrivances, tools, devices by which Satan is able to use them to deflect us away from the simplicity that is in Christ—the straight and the narrow way.

What has been pointed out to us from God's Word is that the most obvious characteristic of Satan is his subtlety. Does it not follow then that subtlety will also be the major characteristic of the ones that he is using—wolves in sheep's clothing? We see the parallel appear in different contexts.

Satan set the pattern and he did it in the Garden of Eden, but he will use a multitude of circumstances—like the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, it does not have to be the same thing that is used all the time. But if he can create the illusions, the distractions, the ploys—whatever we might call it—to get our reasoning, our minds focused on something that is of lesser or minor concern to God than the purpose God has called us for, he has us. He at least has us going in the wrong direction. It does not mean that we cannot turn from it, but at least he has caught our attention where he has then the possibility of destroying us. It will not happen all at once. In one sense of the word, he is very patient that way. But he will, nonetheless, work to lead us step-by-step in that direction.

If we would follow through with the examples Jesus gave in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, what he would lead people into would be things such as houses, furnishings, clothing, cars, status, prestige, being well thought of by certain people, having a prestigious job, living in just the right neighborhood, entertaining the right people, pampering the palette with rich and unhealthy foods, the ears with wild music, the eyes with pornography, the mind with drugs—those things gradually become more important than yielding to God.

It is not something we *leap* into. It is something that he *gradually leads* us into because there is something about sin that is addictive. We need to be aware, because the addiction eventually leads to the place where we are completely and totally enslaved by it.

We could look at things that are maybe more serious than that. You can see these things at work in society, and in history. The true church began in the first century with purity of doctrine. Jesus Christ began it that way. But how long was it before false ministers began to be insinuated within the church? You can tell by the writings of the apostles that it happened almost immediately.

Thinking of it historically, it was not very long before people began to reason that keeping the Sabbath strictly was not that important. The next step was not to keep it at all. Sunday was just as good, because after all, is it not one day in seven? The reasoning begins to be led, step by step by step.

The same process happened with the holy days. The first thing you know, the church, which began with purity, is being led toward the acceptance of the Saturnalia. (It may have taken quite a while.) The solution to this is to never allow yourself to step back in the first place, to never fall for his ploys to be led away from what is truly important.

We can look at the churches around us. Some of them are filled with idols. They reason, "We're not praying to the statue. We're not praying to the idol. Its simply a means to trigger things to remind us so we can pray more fervently to Mary."

People can begin to reason that abortion is alright because the fetus that is there is not really human. These are things that you and I can see clearly, but people were led into this step-by-step, tiny increment by tiny increment, in much the same way drugs capture a person's mind. The person reasons, "What would be wrong with really getting into the spirit of the party?" And so he starts with something innocuous like marijuana. But is not the person led, step-by-step, and the first thing you know he is on to something that is harder; something that began with the simple reasoning, "I want to have fun at this party. I want to be mellow. I want to be with it."

That is what Satan does! It is inch-by-inch. Satan uses our imagination that is born of desire. Desire of and by itself is neutral, and we can imagine, and we can reason. But it is that very process that Satan takes advantage of. This is why I said, "Which line of reasoning are we going to follow?"

He uses our imagination, born of desire, to weave a fanciful screen around some evil thing to make it look acceptable. He creates an illusion that evil is good. So fornication becomes merely the satisfaction of a natural appetite, or it is the expression of a beautiful, romantic love, or a means of enlarging experience before one gets married. That is what happens.

We in America have been conditioned to be very tolerant of other people's views and actions. But the Bible is not tolerant at all about these things! It is not tolerant at all about false ministers and false teaching, because toleration of their teaching makes clear cut distinctions between what is right and wrong almost impossible.

We don't know in the United States what is right and wrong. The reason is because we have been tolerant of false teaching. It blurs the distinction. Everywhere in the Bible God states very clearly what false ministers are. They are a threat to your well-being and so is their teaching. They are perversions of Christianity and what they teach is never presented as partial understandings of Christianity. It is like saying, "Well, a little bit of poison isn't too bad."

The Bible denounces both the teacher and his teachings as destructive of truth and unclean and to be avoided, *not even to be touched!* Do not tempt yourself, God says. It is something to be shunned. Remember in Isaiah 5:20 where Isaiah said, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil."

We do not pronounce final judgment on these people. That is God's responsibility. But certainly we have the responsibility not to be tolerant in our own lives, and to be aware and to test what they say.

Let us be warned once again from the book of John, what a deadly enemy we are facing.

John 8:42-43 "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word."

They had no ear for it. Why? Because their disobedience had blinded them and deafened them to the truth. Right and wrong had become so blurred in their minds they could not hardly tell the difference.

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil [There is the result of falling in to Satan's traps.], and the desires of your father you want to do."

Just as surely as a person on drugs wants eventually to take the drug because he is enslaved by it, sin has an addictive quality and Satan knows very well that if he can get us to sin once, there is a very strong possibility he can get us to sin again, again, and again until eventually we are enslaved by it and we cannot help ourselves.

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Satan's lies produce death through sin and they are deliberate attempts to wipe us out. Satan is a cold-blooded life destroyer and I mean life in two ways: life in terms of ending in death and life in terms of the quality. What is so sad is that he seems to have such an easy time of getting people to swallow that somehow or another it is going to be better to disobey God than obey Him.

Let us go back to Genesis 3, because we need to understand this as clearly as we possibly can.

Genesis 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman,

"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

I would like to change the word "cunning" here just for the sake of this sermon, because I think that it is a little closer to our English word "shrewd." It means sharp, clever in a selfish way. I do not mean to say that cunning is wrong, but somehow or another shrewd has a little bit clearer connotation to me.

If we were talking about a human being, we would say that he was cunning or shrewd. But in the case of Satan the serpent, we have to think of whom it is we are dealing with. To be cunning and shrewd like Satan indicates malevolent brilliance—with the emphasis on malevolent. He is seeking to kill. His cunning is like that of a cat—I do not mean a house cat. I am talking about a tiger or a lion that is silently padding through the forest with eyes malevolently staring out looking for something to eat, to kill, to feed on.

Look how clever his tactic—his device; his contrivance—was in this case. First he moves to subtly make a suggestion rather than an argument to discredit God's authority by casting doubt about God's credibility. "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

It must have been said in such a way that the implication that was in his voice carried with it enough of a tone, enough of an inflection, to indicate that there was some doubt that God was telling the truth. I think that we can say this with assurance because of the way that Eve replied, because she corrected him. She knew from the inflection that was in his voice that he was really asking a question (that was casting doubt) and when she replied she actually over-corrected.

What did that do? Well like a good salesman, the serpent was getting his victim to agree with him—getting the victim to say "yes, yes, yes," and the

first thing you know the person says, "Yes, I'll buy it." She was already in the flow when her reply came along because her reply was an over-correction.

So what has he succeeded in doing already? He has succeeded in magnifying in her mind (through the answer that she gave) God's strictness. You see, the way is narrow. You can see if she is beginning to agree with him, what kind of thought is she beginning to have toward God? She is agreeing; she is saying "yes, yes, yes" to this salesman's ploys.

He immediately minimizes the penalty. "You shall not die," which was an outright lie. Then to clinch the sale, he offers her a reward—"You shall be like God." "If you buy this, this is what you are going to get out of it." What a price she paid. But I will tell you, that reward that he offered to them must have seemed to Adam and Eve like something so big that they could not afford to reject it, because what he said was enough to reorient their lives.

They caught the significance of it—not the full significance, but they knew he was offering them something big. Do you know what it was? The self became the dominating focus of life—"You shall be God." He completely reoriented life by turning their focus away from obedience to God to obedience to the self, because after all, you are going to be god, so you have the right to choose, to set the standards as to what is right and what is wrong. They bought it hook, line, and sinker. That was heady stuff. That was big.

The effect was that from that point on, God came to be viewed by mankind as a rival, a competitor, rather than a friend—somebody to be competed with because now they were gods too! It was really slick. God came to be somebody who was to be outwitted, not cooperated with.

Let us look at it again, only this time we are going to take a little bit different tack. It is good to look at this in as many ways as we possibly can because God put it right at the beginning of the Book where we would be confronted, right after the creation, with the foundation of the way man thinks and why he thinks the way he does.

First of all, Satan made a seemingly gentle suggestion against God's word and God's work by presenting them in a mildly negative light. Remember,

God had spoken to Adam and Eve, thus He had given them His word and they (with their own eyes) could see much about God's person, about His personality, about His mind, by the things that He made.

They were in a beautiful garden. That garden reflected the mind of God. They could see the beauty of that mind. They could see that mind was providing for them and what He had provided for them was beautiful to taste. They knew a great deal about the mind of God simply from what they were able to observe. They knew about the mind of God and the personality of God as well because of what He had said.

So by making the challenge the way Satan did, he at first made them mildly skeptical about God's love. Does God really love you?

Second, he made it seem as though obedience, submission to God, was in reality servility. "You mean God is withholding that from you?" He made them begin to feel as though God's way was restrictive; that God was holding back from them good things. The natural thought that goes from that is that much more could be had from life if we just followed our body's and our mind's natural inclination.

Third, he played his trump card—they not only would not die, but they would be in control and free to determine what is right and wrong. They, in short, would be equal to God. They would be god! Is it not interesting that this is almost exactly what Isaiah recorded that Helel's desire was.

Satan succeeded in bringing into them a spirit of competition against God. Thus Romans 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." He indirectly lied about God Himself, and he directly lied about the penalty while giving them disinformation about the reward.

Yes, he told them the truth that their eyes would be opened and that they would not die, (immediately, that is). Yes, their eyes were now opened. They now looked at things through the twisted perspective that saw evil in almost everything. Now they were ashamed of their nakedness. Before in their innocence, there was no shame there at all. The effect of following the false minister began immediately.

Brethren, this is important because right thoughts precede right actions; right thoughts determine the release of emotions and our thoughts express themselves even in our most casual relationships in daily work, and most importantly, in our intimate relationships in our home and family. And most of all, they express themselves in our relationship with God, and false beliefs about God and His purpose for man are far more destructive than alcohol and drugs. Far more. They confuse, they divide, and they bring on warfare.

Satan's lies, his counterfeits, his devices are usually so subtle that only someone trained can spot them when they occur. Brethren, that is what God is teaching you and me to be able to see. He is training us to be able to spot the ploys, the contrivances, and the stratagems of our enemy so that we will be able to overcome and defeat him.