

Satan (Part 4)

Satan in the Church

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I Corinthians 2 showed us that God gave man a spirit, that we can receive the Spirit of God, which enables us to grasp the spiritual things of God, and there is a spirit of this world. We also saw that man's spirit can be communicated with even without the man being aware that this is going on.

We also saw in last week's sermon that a great deal of spiritual activity is going on. Sometimes that spiritual activity involves the destiny of great nations. Especially we saw that God employs angels, and sometimes even demons, to carry out commands from Him.

We saw that the primary means for Satan to manipulate us was through disinformation and affecting our attitudes. The purpose for this is to move our reasoning processes toward satisfaction of the self. This is especially perverse because satisfaction of the self is not of and by itself intrinsically evil, but putting self before God and others is. That is Satan's aim—that is, trying to push our reasoning processes toward satisfaction of the self—that is his aim because this is the essence of sin.

Satan is called in Ephesians 2 the prince of the power of the air. Apparently in most cases the manipulation occurs in an indirect way. The air is surcharged with his spirit and we are by nature tuned-in to his wavelength. The only way to avoid manipulation is to be enabled to tune him out.

Perceiving that we are being influenced is not always easy because yielding to his influence is what we have been doing since we were born. We've been doing it all of our life. Therefore it feels natural for us to go in that direction. But what is natural to man is enmity against God, according to Romans 8:7. Even if we are unable to catch it when it is occurring, it will still produce fruit, and we should then be able to catch it by being able to see the evidence of the fruit that is produced.

Satan, of course, is always attempting to get us to sin but, even though we may sin, we still may not catch it. That is because sin has become so ingrained as a part of our life we don't recognize it as sin. But somewhere along the line, fruit is going to be produced. Even if we don't catch it—that is, Satan's influence—when we sin, somewhere along the line other fruit is going to be produced that will give us evidence that we have been manipulated.

You'll recall in that sermon that I said that evidences that he is at work in our life, in other people's lives, in institutions of which we are a part, and in cultures in which we live, are confusion, division, and warfare. I also stated that it's not necessarily in that order. However, that is the usual progression.

This whole mess on earth began when vanity began to arise in Satan (or Helel) over his beauty. I take the word beauty not just to refer to his appearance, but also to refer to all of his abilities, including a tremendous intelligence, wisdom, and all those other things—skills that God built into him.

Somewhere along the line—I don't know whether it was one year, a hundred years, or ten thousand years after God created him—Satan told himself a lie that he believed. That lie was that he felt that he was not getting his due. He was so intelligent, he was so beautiful, and he was so talented that he was in a position inferior to what he should rightfully have.

That is impossible because God is intrinsically love. It is a part of His nature. It's impossible for Him to treat anybody wrong, just as it is impossible for God to sin in any way. He is always looking out for the best interest of all concerned—individuals, or the group, or institution. Satan, because of the urging of his vanity, told himself a lie, which he believed.

This lie burned in him so that he couldn't hold it in himself any longer and then he told himself another lie as to what the solution was to be. He began to enlist other angels into his feelings that they too were being mistreated and that the solution was to attack God, knock Him off His throne, and thus they would be in the rightful position and be able to make the rules.

As this insurrection grew, it divided them from God and eventually warfare occurred.

Revelation 20:1-2 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

Our understanding is, of course, that this occurs at the beginning of that one thousand year period.

Revelation 20:7-8 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

I turned to this scripture because I want us to be impressed with how effective he is in his nefarious schemes—that even after one thousand years of not having his influence, and mankind living under the government of God so that men are fully capable of comparing properly, he is still able to deceive and lead people into warfare against God. I'll tell you, he is the greatest salesman of all time.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this series, the motivation for this series came from Mr. Herbert Armstrong's 1978 article entitled, "What You May Not Know." Mr. Armstrong's point, his purpose, in that article was to exhort us, or to give us understanding, so that we might appreciate our vulnerability. The article was written because Mr. Armstrong felt that there were many in the ministry—it was aimed at the ministry primarily, not at the lay member—who did not appreciate that they, too, either had been deceived or were capable of being deceived. Apparently, some in the ministry had expressed to him that Satan didn't deceive them. The article was written so that we would take heed lest we felt that we were standing.

The important thing to you and me is don't get so proud that you think that you can handle Satan easily. He has a great number of tools coming at us,

but yet on the other hand, there is no need for us to be overly concerned about him either, where we are looking for demons behind every tree, every bush, as the cause of every problem that we have. We can do enough damage ourselves. But we do need to understand that he is around, that he is still active, and if we aren't aware, we can be vulnerable.

Acts 5:1-3 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"

In verse 4, he tells them they had lied to God. In verse 5, Ananias dropped dead.

Here are two church members who apparently did not take Satan into consideration. They listened to a lie and were divided, first of all, from God's church and then from life itself. What did Satan do? He moved them toward self-satisfaction to the point—here was the actual sin—that they lied to take credit for a greater sacrifice than they actually made.

The sad part of this is that no one asked them to donate the entire sale price of the piece of land. What happened was they committed themselves to it and then undoubtedly began to feel put on. "Hey, Sapphira, that's too much money." Or, "Hey, Ananias, I agree with you." Maybe they began to think, "We didn't expect we'd get so much money from the sale of this and that is too much to donate to the common cause." They began to think, undoubtedly, of other uses that they could put the money to. "We could buy clothing. We could improve a part of our house. We could buy another piece of land as an investment and reap even greater rewards from it."

They had apparently already told those who were in charge of the collection that they would contribute the entire amount of the sale and then, when the time came to give the contribution, they only gave a part of it but let on like it was the entire sale price. The difference between the two they kept for themselves.

I wonder who it was who led them to dare to lie? Do you see the process? Satan has *modus operandis* and he is always going to move us in the direction of self-satisfaction at the expense of obedience to God, or at the expense of service to God, or at the expense of service to others, so that we elevate ourselves over the others.

Is that not what Satan did? In his own mind, his vanity elevated him greater than the position God had given to him and it then began to work on his mind so that he had to do something about it. This process keeps repeating itself over and over again.

Let's go back to Matthew—and this is an interesting, interesting circumstance. We need to see what occurred here in its context.

Matthew 16:13-17 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

This was the man who just said to Jesus, "You are the Messiah." Peter took Him aside. The indication is that it was something done in urgency, that there was a deep feeling and perhaps even a bit of jostling. I don't mean that it was done meanly at all.

Matthew 16:22-23 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned [its almost as if Peter grabbed Him by the

shoulder to get His attention; turned Him part way; then in response to what Peter said, Jesus fully turned and faced him—face to face; a right in your face kind of thing] and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Peter clearly believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But what was wrong here? Peter also disagreed with the way the purpose of God was going to be worked out through Christ. What Peter objected to was his good Friend having to go through a scourging, a painful and shameful crucifixion, which is a terrible way to die, especially for one so good. Peter knew that. For Jesus to suffer all the ignominy; to have Him berated by those who were in authority—and Peter recognized that those people who were in the seats of authority couldn't hold a candle to Jesus. And yet these mean men would be sitting in a place where they could actually have Him delivered to death.

Peter disagreed with what the Messiah said God's purpose was and how it was going to be worked out. I think we can relate to what Peter said. It really was a touching sentiment, because he didn't want to see Christ suffer and die; but brethren, the sentiment was wrong and Christ identified the source of what Peter said as Satan.

Now how? How did He isolate that and say this was from Satan? One way was because it followed the same pattern as Satan's temptations in Matthew 4—offering Christ Messiahship without suffering. That's what he offered Him. "Just bow down to me and I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. You don't have to suffer, Jesus." (That last statement of mine was implied.)

Satan knew the scriptures. He knew who Jesus was and he also knew the scriptures better than Peter did. Satan was tossing in front of Christ the temptation of achieving Messiahship, rulership over the world, without having to go through the ignominy of a scourging and death by crucifixion.

I'm sure it was quite a temptation. Probably most of us would not have taken that way. Jesus recognized it right away.

We know that was not God's will. God's will was that the Messiah first had to suffer and die for man's sins. Where does it say that in God's word? Isaiah 52 and 53 are very clear. That's what God's will was regarding the Messiah.

Peter, when he spoke, was not speaking God's words or thoughts regarding the Messiah. Instead, Peter was speaking—he was mouthing—what he would like to see. But God's thoughts are not man's thoughts. What Peter was speaking was the common Jewish conception of a warrior messiah who would put down the enemies of Judah, elevate Judah over their conquerors, and Judah would become the kingpin of all the nations on the earth. Thus, the suffering Messiah, who dies for the sins of man, would be by-passed. But God had willed first things first.

Where in the world did Peter get that idea? (Here comes Satan back into the picture again.) Peter was a victim of disinformation regarding God's word and he became a stumbling block to others. The disinformation came from Satan through his false prophets.

This has an application to you and me directly, besides the fact that we see the point that is involved here. Beginning in verse 24, notice what the teaching is:

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." . . .

The teaching that comes immediately after the direct ethical application of what occurred in this sequence of events, beginning in verse 13 and ending in verse 23—the application for you and me is, like the Messiah, we must deny ourselves.

Put Satan back in the picture. What is he going to do to you and me? Through disinformation and the affecting of our attitudes, he is going to lead us toward self-satisfaction, not self-denial, because self-satisfaction is the essence of sin and when we sin we bring upon ourselves the death penalty.

In order to get the lesson straight, what Jesus immediately taught (in order to counteract what Satan was subtly teaching through Peter) was that the way to the Kingdom of God was through self-denial, not self-satisfaction. Satan is going to try to persuade us not to deny ourselves, but to fulfill ourselves at the expense of others.

There is another thing that this can teach us, and that is that very great temptations can come through well-meaning friends. Peter meant well. I am sure it shocked him right out of his socks when Jesus turned and said, "Get thee behind Me Satan!" right up in Peter's face. I don't think He was angry. I think He was just urgent that Peter catch the picture.

Surely God would not want you to face this kind of a trial, would He? Yes, it just might happen if the temptation comes through well-meaning people. The reason I am going through this is that we are particularly vulnerable when we can be led to believe that we are not being treated as we deserve.

That was a major ploy that Satan used against Adam and Eve. "Oh, has God said such and such? He's withholding from you." That was the implication. "Why, if you do things the way you want, you can have much more. You can be god." We always want more. That's part of human nature.

Unfortunately, mankind keeps making things worse by making the same general mistakes over and over again, in each generation. It will not end until each individual decides he won't do it regardless of the cost to himself—denying the self. We have to understand that there are some things in life that are beyond our control and they must be left for God to solve.

Let's go to I Peter. I want you to be thinking about what is in I Peter because it is a very important book to each one of us.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts [self-indulgence] which war against the soul [or life], having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers [being treated unfairly], they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God [later on—they don't understand now] in the day of visitation.

What we are going through here has to be seen in the overall context of the book. Peter is striving to inspire these people to *hope* in what must have been a very difficult circumstance in their life. The trial they were having was not one that came and went quickly. It was one that was wearing away at them, so that they were slowly having built up within them an attitude of hopelessness.

Humanly, we are always prone to look for quick solutions to get out from under the burden that's been imposed upon us. I am not going to tell you that that is wrong, because it's not. However, the problem is that frequently our solution puts us into the fire spiritually at the same time it appears to solve the problem physically.

By the time Peter gets to the conclusion of this letter, Satan is very much in his thoughts. A Christian can never afford not to give Satan consideration that he might just be a part (maybe a major part) of the picture of what they are going through.

In I Peter 5 I want you to see that when we get to the conclusion of the book, it is telling us what to do in difficult situations when it seems hopeless and we're going through great difficulty.

I Peter 5:6-8 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The thought is this: Satan may or may not be the cause of the situation, but even if he is not, he is prowling around to take advantage of it, that he might pick us off. The roaring lion—who does the lion most likely attack? The strays; the ones who are on the fringes; those who are on the outside; those who are not keeping up with the group.

When we think of that spiritually, they are simply people who are not with it. They are wearying under the barrage of problems that causes them to begin to separate themselves away. Then Satan, the roaring lion, picks off the strays.

He is especially adept at taking advantage of people's feelings. All too often we are dominated by our emotions rather than facts or, we might say, the truth of God. Under that kind of a circumstance, it is very easy for us to get our feelings hurt, ignore the facts, and proceed to lie to ourselves just like Satan did at the beginning of the process.

Let's go back to I Peter 2, and we're going to begin to look at the areas that are covered by him. These are the kinds of situations that are tailor made to make us feel as though we are being put upon, taken advantage of, or made to feel less than what we feel we ought to be.

I Peter 2:13-15 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

I Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

It is very easy to feel put upon by government—municipal government, state government, national government—governments in general. They take advantage of us. They put the pressure on us through taxes. They won't allow us to do things that we feel we ought to be able to do. They give us traffic tickets—all kinds of things. Government can be a means through which we begin to feel as though we are taken advantage of.

In verse 18, Peter covers a situation regarding a person's employment.

I Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

Our boss takes advantage of us. He doesn't pay us what we are worth. He makes us work longer hours than we feel that we should. He puts the pressure on in regard to the Sabbath or Holy Days or to keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. He gives us the kind of work that is beneath our dignity. He gives us the kind of work for which we are overqualified and we don't feel challenged. There are all kinds of ways we can feel pressure from employers.

In these kinds of situations, Peter is not saying we should not compromise at all. He is saying for the Lord's sake, that is, out of regard for Him, we are to control ourselves so we don't rebel. To allow our emotions to have free reign to the point of rebellion is the same as calling God into account—that is, we are (at least indirectly) telling Him that He doesn't know how to run His creation.

I Peter 2:19-21 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God [for the Lord's sake] one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

Let me make this clear: Peter is not saying that the commendable thing is the suffering, but the commendable thing is that you are submitted to God's will and that you are suffering, not because you did something wrong, but because you did something right. That's what is commendable. In addition to that, you are not striking back. That's what your emotions would lead you to do.

Beginning in verse 21, we see that Jesus is the model we are to follow. And in verse 23:

I Peter 2:23 Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

That is a clear recognition in the life of Jesus that there are some things that must be left for God to take care of. He did not strike out at these people. He turned the other cheek, kept His mouth shut, bit His tongue, and did not strike back.

What is God saying in this whole thing? It is recognition from God that life is unfair. What we have to understand is that life is unfair largely because of the way men have chosen to deal with problems. It is the responsibility of the Christian to deal with problems the way God says to deal with them. Remember, Satan is still in the picture and he is going to try to move you to deal with problems his way. That won't be good. It will keep the problems rolling.

After the end of chapter 2, Peter moves on to marriage—another place where we can feel oppressed. Marriage is a place where our emotions are very severely affected, because things happen that are caused by, or we are affected by, one that we feel should never do what they have done to us—and perhaps emotionally, this is the most volatile of all the situations.

Marriage is also the one we are most likely to be involved in. Also, it is the one in which we are most likely to let our own emotions run amok. Peter tells the husbands, especially, in what way to treat their wives so that their prayers may not be hindered.

Again remember I Peter 5, that Satan is still in the context of the writing here, unmentioned, but he is in Peter's thoughts. That is surely some kind of situation there that Satan is going to try to take advantage of, to cut people off from God—the epitome of his efforts.

I Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.

Notice the advice. Do not these things require a great deal of control, a rejection of the feelings that Satan may be in the background trying to stir up?

I Peter 3:9 Loving, tenderhearted, courteous; not returning evil for evil [that's what Satan would want you to do] or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

He's really talking about turning the other cheek, is he not? I never want to get too far in this sermon without reminding you that Satan is always trying to move us, motivate us, guide us, lead us, toward self-satisfaction in any circumstance. If you are in a position, a circumstance, in which you are trying to defeat somebody, I would have to say he has a hold of you. Satan is competitive. Think about that.

I Peter 3:13-15 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts...

Here's the advice. Sanctify means "set Him apart." It means in this case, "make God the focus of your thinking; make God the focus of your approach to life; make God the focus of the circumstance that you find yourself in."

Is that not what Peter forgot in Matthew 16? The disinformation was the focus of Peter's response to Jesus—not God's thoughts. If God's thoughts, if God's word, had really been sanctified in Peter's heart at that time, he never would have said what he did. He would have said something like, "Yes, Jesus, I understand. That's what the scripture says." But instead, he disagreed with God. When one sanctifies God in his heart, then the word of God becomes the focus, not the word from the spirit of this world.

I Peter 3:15 And always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness [gentleness] and fear

I Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

If I get that far in this sermon, we are going to see another reference to this by the apostle John, because Peter is writing here to show us how far the model, Jesus, went in suffering unjustly. It is a high standard, but He went all the way to the death without giving in to His emotions, His feelings, and allowing Satan to get a hold of Him and think that God was being unfair or unjust in what He was causing or allowing Jesus to go through.

I Peter 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men [feelings; desires], but for the will of God.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery [or painful] trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Looking at these scriptures in the light of I Peter 5:6-8, and understanding that Peter is writing with his thoughts on Satan in the background and the possibility of his part, our feelings are especially vulnerable because it is natural for us to feel that we are being taken advantage of or not being treated as we should be, and our emotions begin to run wild. That is tailor-made for Satan to take advantage of. That's what he fell prey to. Either he will try to move us in that direction or if it begins to happen even without him, then he will take advantage of that situation and make sure that he will affect our emotions.

Let's go to Jude 6. I don't think we need to spend a lot of time on this, but in the context we have a pattern established by demons. Jude is attacking false prophets and thus men and demons are kind of interwoven in the context. There are three sins that he indicts these false prophets for and that's mainly what I want to pick from here.

Jude 6-8 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under

darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in similar manner to these, having given themselves over to the sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.

The three sins that he indicts them for are:

1. Lusts—they defile the flesh, that is, allowing a feeling to take one over the edge into sin.
2. Rebelliousness—they flout authority in general, but primarily that of Christ. It is something that is hidden in the Greek, but the word authority is really "Lordship." It is a word that is normally used in the sense of referring to Christ and His Lordship over us.
3. Disrespect or disregard of spirit beings. (That becomes clearer in verse 9 which we did not read.)

This number 3 is kind of interesting because he is saying in effect that it is not that these false prophets will not talk about Satan, but rather it is a gratuitous, despising, or denigrating of angelic powers, indicating in their preaching that it's not something that we need to be concerned about. It's kind of side-stepping the issue.

You know why they would do that? Because a false spirit is leading them, so they downgrade this through the preaching as though it is something that we do not need to be concerned about. This is clearly seen largely in the Protestant world, especially the mainline denominations that have almost gone to the place where they almost universally agree that there really is no such thing as Satan the Devil or demons. That's how successful they have been out there.

On the other hand, there are the evangelical groups in Protestantism who will talk about such things as twisting Satan tail. "Oh, we're going to put down the devil tonight!" You run into these things in their tent shows that they put on in their evangelistic campaigns. But, you see what they are doing? They

are putting Satan in a position where they seemingly have power over him. They are so deceived.

The truth in regard to Satan is somewhere in between. Hopefully the true church and God's people will have that truth and they will understand that yes, Satan is; yes he is powerful; but yes, because of God, they do have power over him in that they can reject. We are not puppets on a string and he cannot pull our strings unless we give him the opportunity. If we're able to see it, we don't have to submit to him.

I wanted you to see that because Jude is telling us signs to look for in preaching or in false ministers—that there will be a denigrating of Satan and his demons; there will be (not to the same extent in every individual) indications of lusts, that is, allowing feelings to take one over the edge into sin; and they will flout the authority of Jesus Christ.

II Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you [Peter brings it home, very clearly, right into the church.], who will secretly [notice what he says here] bring in destructive heresies.

This is very interesting because if this word "secretly" were translated into the closest English synonym, it would have to be the word "smuggle." They smuggle in—that is so interesting to me. Cunning deceit. The word literally means "they bring it along side," that is they present this heresy in such a way as to make it appear favorably with the truth. "Oh, it's just a refinement. We're not really changing anything. You understand that, don't you? We're not really changing it. It's just a refinement, a clarification."

II Peter 2:1 ...Even denying the Lord who bought them....

One denies the Lord by failing to submit to Him in obedience. If the doctrines gradually begin to be changed, then submission to Christ is going to be put on different terms as well.

II Peter 2:1-2 ...And bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways...

That word "destructive" will translate into the English word "pernicious" which means "deadly." We hear it most frequently in the medical term "pernicious anemia." The thing that is so interesting about this is that it may appear innocent, but all the while it is destroying life. It is something that gives the appearance of being not overtly or openly dangerous, but all the while it is undermining one's health. Of course, Peter is talking about spiritual health.

II Peter 2:2-3 ...By whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness [tie that to Jude 6-9 regarding lust] they will exploit you with deceptive words...

What he is saying is that they turn the church into a commercial operation. The reason is because Peter says these are men of evil ambition. They are covetous. Their primary objective is success in argument, not truth. The changes are made in order to exploit—back to the commercialism. That's why the feigned words, or the deceptive or phony arguments.

We won't go through the whole context here, but I believe I mentioned to you in the sermon last week that we in the United States, especially, have been conditioned to be tolerant. But if we would read completely through II Peter 2 and the whole book of Jude, we would find it very clear that God is not tolerant of this kind of thing.

We are tolerant because we have lost, or we never had, a sense of the diabolical danger of Satan's false teaching. It's leading people to death! As a nation we have become dulled to the distinction between truth and falsehood, not only in terms of right and wrong in behavior, but also in terms of ideas or concepts.

If we went on to verse 9 we would see that Peter says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations." He very clearly understands that Satan is somewhere in the picture and he wants us to be encouraged, to be filled with hope, because these people, though they appear to be gaining strength, are still under God's control and He knows how to deliver His people from their schemes—even as He delivered Noah and Lot and others in the past from the schemes that were going on in those cities.

Let's go to I Corinthians, because we need to begin to narrow this subject down and look at this from the standpoint of a church or congregation. In order to get this the most clearly we have to remember the principle that John gave us in I John 4:1 regarding the antichrist and about testing the spirit or spirits; how a spirit or the spirits are influencing a man who in turn influences other men.

I Corinthians 1:10-13 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

This same book says in I Corinthians 14:33 that God is not the author of confusion. Yet, it is very obvious that here is a church that is confused, and is divided, and is fighting one another. Cliques had arisen and they were struggling for power within the congregation. God didn't do that. Who did?

Satan does not come into the picture in I Corinthians, however Paul does say in I Corinthians 2:12 that there is a spirit of this world. But, Satan does come into the picture in a fairly large way in II Corinthians.

We have to look at I and II Corinthians as a unity. Paul wrote the one in response to the household of Chloe telling him these things. Perhaps they wrote a letter to Paul. Then after writing I Corinthians, a little bit of time went by and then they wrote a letter back to Paul again, explaining some of the things that had occurred. Then Paul wrote II Corinthians back to them in response to their letter.

There was no III Corinthians as far as we know, so either the problem was resolved or God decided not to carry it any further than that. It gives us a very good picture—Satan was in the picture. He was causing the division. He was causing the confusion. He was causing the fighting that was going on.

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

II Corinthians 4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

Very clearly, he's talking about Satan.

II Corinthians 10:3-4 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.

Brethren, we're fighting a spiritual war.

II Corinthians 11:13-15 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

In addition to this, both James and I Peter conclude their books with an admonition regarding Satan; John speaks of the antichrist; II Peter and Jude speak of fallen angels. I mentioned these things because I want you to see that the apostles were not unmindful of Satan's influence on the church. Neither should we be.

Satan had succeeded in putting the Corinthian church into confusion—confusion about doctrines, confusion about moral issues, confusion about church policy. Regardless of the central issues, the fruit of his involvement is marked all through the letters. Instead of there being the gentle meekness and love and peace of God's Spirit, there was a great deal of self-justifying and self-righteous pride leading to bad feelings and the attacking of one another.

I Corinthians 8:1-3 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

Perhaps these seemingly innocuous words are really the central issue in this whole book (or even books), because this was the sin that led Satan into his separation from God's government. He got puffed up about himself. These people were puffed up about how much they knew.

Satan thought so much of himself that he became so twisted in his thinking, and he attacked. We don't attack God directly. This book shows us we attack each other! Therein lies the problem. We attack each other through gossip, through rumors and accusations, and things of that nature.

We begin to draw up lists in our minds of the faults of others that offend us and the result is we begin to withdraw from these people and we won't associate with them. The division begins to occur because these people offend us. We say to ourselves, "Well, they were mean to me, or they aren't intelligent enough, or they have some kind of peculiar characteristics. They wear garish clothing or they have strong opinions about unimportant things."

I'm not saying these things are right and good. I am not saying that one should be able to do his own thing at anytime, anywhere, and that we should be tolerant of it. I am only saying that Satan can, if he is given the opportunity, lead our minds to find reasons that we will not associate with others—reasons that have nothing at all to do with sin. Satan is at work.

If the feeling continues unabated then we will eventually get to the place where we will withdraw from fellowship altogether. It won't happen quickly, necessarily, and it won't happen except in gradual ways. Maybe we'll stop attending Bible Studies or we'll begin to find reasons not to come to Sabbath services, or we'll come late to services and leave early. Satan is slowly but surely moving us toward self-indulgence rather than love.

We will end on this thought: Do you realize that (in the biblical sense) hate is not the opposite of love? Self-centeredness is. Hate is merely one expression of self-centeredness.

When I give my next sermon on Satan, we will, at least generally, pick up with this thought. We need to understand the direction Satan is moving us and that is toward self-centeredness, self-indulgence, where we will not deny ourselves, where we will operate our lives at the expense of God or others. We have to begin to be able to see that this is the direction that our mind is being led.