

Satan, Division, And Humility

Satan Motivates Competition; Competition Motivates Division

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I do not know whether it is the most dominating character trait of human nature's self-centeredness, but I am pretty sure that competitiveness is very high on the list, and by this drive very much of the level of the peaceful and harmonious quality and activities of life is disturbed.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* states that to compete is "to strive with another or others to obtain a goal." The *American Webster Online Dictionary* defines "competitive" (the adjective form) as "inclined, desiring, or suited to compete."

I think Wikipedia gives the best one. It defines competition (the noun form) as "a contest between individuals, groups, nations, animals, etc., for territory, a niche, or a location of resources; it arises whenever two or more parties strive for a goal which cannot be shared." A clear example of this last one is that not everybody can get first prize. It is one of those things that cannot be shared.

Because we live in a badly divided world, Jesus gives us a head-up in Matthew 24's prophecy, warning us that as His return nears we would hear of wars and rumors of wars. And He thus indicates that as wars and rumors of wars have continued throughout time, there will be a noticeable increase of them as the time nears for His return. This is somewhat important to this sermon, because competition produces war. That is not the only thing it produces. It produces winners, but very often what happens is war is a result.

Let us add another factor to this: coveting. Coveting—the breaking of the Tenth Commandment, combined with competition for the same object—is the cause of almost all of these wars, and as we are aware, much, much more besides. It causes divorce, which is war on a small scale waged between two people. Business is war that has been so proclaimed by many social critics. They perceive the giants of industry as cold-blooded moguls who move

without feeling to maneuver and capture their business competitors and financial trap in order to gain a larger segment of the available wealth.

I read a book a number of years ago titled, "The Last of the Moguls." That was the theme of that book. The theme featured the business accomplishments and a brief overview of the business attitude of families like the Rockefellers, the DuPonts, the Kennedys, Mellon, Morgan, Vanderbilt, and several others besides. The book presented them as highly competitive and sometimes brutally cunning in business.

Politics is highly competitive, and "politics is war," so says Von Clausewitz, a military strategy genius, who proclaimed that the deadly fighting in the fields of battle with weapons designed to maim and kill, is nothing more than politics removed from the negotiating table to the fields of bloody weaponry.

In the Israelitish nation, the dominant economic model is capitalism, and the dominant motivation of capitalism is competition to create wealth. In capitalism, competition is perceived as good; without it the experts claim there would be no advancement in quality of life. In fact, the central theme of the theory of evolution is survival of the fittest, which is simply a euphemism for the continuation of life through competition; and therefore the species survive and is better because of the competition.

In the area of athletics, the object is to defeat those who are striving for the same goal. In some cases the competition becomes so intense that the players will actually proclaim that in the field of playing—"It is war out there!" With my own ears I have heard people in NASCAR racing say, "If you ain't driving to cheat, you ain't winning either," which points out in a very simple way what the drive to compete and gain for the self has the potential to produce.

It is not good, by a long shot, as one can see with one's own eyes about what has gone on in the past to the present. If competition is uncontrolled, fairness, equity, equality, impartiality, integrity, and justice begin sliding right out the window, and then those less strongly competitive, and maybe less skilled and playing by the rules, are not on a level playing field. It is

almost as if the rest have to run uphill against those who have the competitive edge, because humanly, unfairness, inequity, prejudice and bias, injustice, and favoritism have the opportunity to move right in.

There is no doubt from whom the fire's competition is derived. The source is the spirit of Satan who is so competitive that he took on the Creator God to wrest rulership from Him. Competitiveness ultimately separates people from each other, and this day—the day of Atonement—is about how that is going to be resolved.

I have even read where in sports that are pretty rough, like football, that some coaches find it distasteful when one of their athletes gets religion. And why? Because they begin to lose their edge of competitiveness—fire.

Turn now with me to Ecclesiastes 4:4-5, a very interesting couple of scriptures.

Ecclesiastes 4:4-5 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

Verse 4, here, is poorly translated in both the KJV and in the NKJV because the translators chose to translate two words *literally* rather than follow the imagery that rightly depicts how the words were used in actual practice by Hebrew-speaking people. The two words are "skillful" and "envy."

Listen to how the Soncino, the Jewish Commentary, translates that verse: "Again, I considered all labor and all excelling in works, that it is a man's *rivalry* with his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind."

Now here is how the *Revised English Bible* translates that verse: "I considered all toil and all achievement, and saw that it springs from rivalry between one person and another. This too is futility and a chasing after wind."

Finally I am going to read this to you out of the *Amplified Version*. I think it makes it just about as clear as it can possibly be translated. "Then I saw that

all painful effort in labor and all skill in work comes from man's rivalry with his neighbor. This is also vanity, a vain striving after the wind and a feeding on it."

Solomon wrote this book late in his life, and thus his comments, which come so very close to absolute truth, are somewhat cynical. He had observed a great deal about life, and his observation is that the incentive to work is not the accomplishment of something truly worthwhile; it is in short a bad motivation, and life thus becomes *rivalry*-based rather than mutual *cooperation*-based, and the potential for producing bad fruit rises exceedingly with the rivalry. That is why God judges it as a vanity—something that is futile.

On the other end of the scale, as the Hebrew people often did, is verse 5, which says, "The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh." It is telling us there that the indolent fool who does not appreciate the necessity to work hard at a livelihood is the same thing as folding his hands in lazy idleness when he should be up and about doing things, but instead he wastes his life away.

Brethren, somewhere there is a balance between these two, because God reconciles things, and the observation Solomon made there was essentially correct, because man's rivalry and competitiveness with one another is unchecked. It is free to do just about anything, and when it does, all kinds of imbalances begin to occur within a society.

From here we are going to go to something that happened between Abraham and Lot recorded in Genesis 13, and it shows what a truly balanced Christian God-fearing man does in such a case.

Genesis 13:5-6 But Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to nourish and support them so they could dwell together, for their possessions were too great for them to live together.

We see that both wanted the same land. "Not everybody can finish in first place," is the situation here.

Genesis 13:7-8 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land [making fodder more difficult to obtain]. So Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife, I beg of you, between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are relatives.

You might remember in I Corinthians 6 Paul said, "*Why not just give it up? Instead of fighting, competing for whatever it is, why don't you just give it up?*" Where do you think he got that idea? He got it out of Genesis 13, because that is what the "father of the faithful" did. So we have this episode here resulting from competition for the same grazing area.

Now in the *Interpreter's Commentary, Volume I, Pages 584 to 588*, the commentator evaluates the pros and cons of competition. This commentator concludes at this point:

Note that there will always be two classes of men, and regarding them, every man needs to consider which one he is tending to belong to—the men like Lot or the men like Abraham. It is a distinction that every young man who first surveys his will and determines what kind of success he will aim at; it confronts every mature person in the return decisions where conscience would go one way, and the temptation to experiment in Sodom points the other.

This incident in Genesis 13 is a very small incident in terms of all of the world's activities, and certainly small in terms of time. It gives insight though into a truism. It is the competitive struggle for gain that is at the heart of most of the conflicts of our time as well as it was in the time of Abraham and Lot.

Now man is acquisitive, and that acquisitive impulse seems to be insatiable in many. It demands more and more, and it seemingly is never satisfied. The unconverted man, for the sake of his ego, desires to win, and if men do not compete for profit, they will compete for power or for prestige or for pleasure.

The subject of competition and the struggles, including fighting and warfare that ensue, does not end here in Genesis as far as the Bible is concerned. The *Interpreter's Commentary, Volume 11, Pages 440-442* has another entry, and it has an interesting thought within it. I want you to turn with me to I Timothy 5, verses 17 and 18.

I Timothy 5:17-18 Let the elders who perform the duties of their office well be considered doubly worthy of honor [and of adequate financial support], especially those who labor faithfully in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain,' and again, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire.'

Let us stop for just a minute. Paul is counseling Timothy that although he personally determined that he would not accept any wages for his labors in behalf of the church, he was most certainly not against other elders being paid for doing the same thing he offered freely.

It is right here again that the commentator's comments are of interest. From the fact of what Jesus clearly stated in Luke 10:7 ("the workman deserves his wages") and from what Paul reinforces by quoting Deuteronomy 24:4 ("You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn")—the commentator moves on to what he believes the social consequences would be if a nation would follow what appears to be the biblical program. Here is what he concluded that the Bible shows:

1. "A Christian's primary motive is to be service rather than profit."
2. "There is a social obligation to see that every worker is adequately rewarded for his work."
3. "Competition for gain should be replaced with cooperation in service. Christianity cannot be identified with capitalism, socialism, or any other particular economic system."

Before I make the next statement, understand that man hardly gets anything right out of the Bible. I believe that all three of these statements are right principles. His comments made me wonder what kind of system will be used in Christ's rule of the Earth that contains balancing incentives to serve and to produce at one and the same time. It forces me to ask this question. Is

capitalism really a God-based system as modern Christianity seems to espouse it is right?

There is no doubt that capitalism is able to produce wealth and spread it around in a fairly balanced way through the culture, but history also shows me that an evil side-effect also intensifies competitive spirit in man, and with that it also produces disagreement, division, and war in a variety of levels and intensity. In other words, you cannot use a wrong system and produce good all around for everybody.

We are going to turn now to Galatians, to another set of familiar scriptures. These are in Galatians 5:19-21. I am going to read these from the *Amplified Version*.

Galatians 5:19-21 [Amplified Version] Now the doings (practices) of the flesh are clear (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you beforehand, just as I did previously, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

That is quite a listing. Please understand this. Most of you using the KJV and the NKJV have in it the word "work." The Amplified Version translated that either "doings" or "practices." "Work" gives one the impression that one has to labor to produce the characteristics that are listed in Galatians 5:17-19. That, brethren, is patently untrue! The flesh does these things by nature. It is natural to produce that kind of list of immoral behavior. The fight is to *not* do them. In the flesh we produce these characteristics naturally unless we make effort to stop the flesh from producing them. This is where the problem comes in for you and me, because God's overall purpose is clearly stated in John 17. It is oneness with His children. He wants His children to be just like Jesus Christ, and just like Christ is with Him. However, each and every one of these works, practices is a destructive barb that explosively, sometimes violently, separates people from each other, and most importantly from God.

In my memory at preparing this sermon, one word in this group was what started what I am giving to you right now. It is the word "strife." In the KJV it is "variance." In the NKJV it is translated "contention." So we have here three synonyms for that Greek word it underlies: variance, contention, or strife.

Now unless you have one of the newer Strong's concordances as I do, you might not find the Greek word used here and translated into three different synonyms, but my concordance says this: "The stress in this word is on rivalry [competition]." The way it is translated is what the rivalry produces. It produces variance, contention, warfare, separating people from one another. So the stress in this word is on rivalry. It points to what competition is and produces. It produces separation, variance, contentions and strife. It clearly produces division.

Now Zodhiates adds another interesting sidebar to this word. He says that the antonym—the opposite for the Greek word translated as strife, contentions, or rivalry—is the Greek word which means "peace."

All of these works that are listed here in verses 19 through 21, together clearly indicate why there is so much disagreement and division everywhere throughout all time, and that includes these things being in the church. This listing is simply the evidence that appears outwardly of the way of human nature, and it has been this way since the first sin—the one that created the original division of mankind from God and is a division that has never been healed.

Now let us put a cap on this portion of the sermon by turning to Isaiah 59, where God, through Isaiah, gives us a pretty good rundown why the social system in this world, in the United States, is the way it is.

Isaiah 59:1-8 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, [Think about a million babies being murdered every year through abortion.] and your fingers with

iniquity; [Think of all the thievery going on.] your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

Look at the evidence I gave you—just four things that floated across my desk of how great the iniquities are in this country. And why are those iniquities there? Because we have no contact with God, and so we cannot judge righteous judgment, and so people are going to be treated unfairly wherever, and it looks like it is never going to end.

Now sin, regardless of the intensity, always produces separation. The ultimate in separation is death, of which result Adam and Eve were warned. Sin separates one from God and fellowman. It is impossible for sin to create unity, except briefly, and in most cases that unity is made for further opportunities to sin together. The ways to sin and create division are not limited to those listed in Galatians 5:19. What Paul gave there is almost like a stock list of evil conduct which quickly came to Paul's mind as he was writing in order to show a measure of contrast with the fruits of the spirit which follow.

Adam and Eve were not only separated from God spiritually, but also physically. Now watch as I give you a quick overview of mankind's progress away from God and away from oneness with God and man.

Now Cain, after Adam and Eve, did not treat Abel well, did he? How about Lamech, in the next chapter? He murdered a couple of men. By Genesis the 6

th chapter the earth was filled with violence. God sent the Flood to calm things down, and after the Flood God again commanded the people to fill the earth and spread over it, but Nimrod was a "mighty hunter *against* the Lord", and he, with the help of the people, became God's rival. He competed with God for the people's loyalty, and the people concentrated themselves in Babylon despite what God said. They too were at variance against God, and then God forcibly segregated them by confusing their language to keep them from unifying in rebellion.

What did this produce for the Gentiles? What did they gain as a result of what they did? God wanted them to be taught by the descendents of Shem so that there would be contact with God, and most specifically from the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Turn with me to the book of Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 11. Paul was speaking directly to the Gentile Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

In doing what they did between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, they cut themselves off from contact with the teaching that God was going to give through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so they were without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world all because they were at variance with God.

Let us turn to James 3:13-18.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where

envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Each of the characteristics James mentions in verses 14 and 16 is a sin, and they are sheer foolishness. Peace exists when people are at one. Brethren, peace is essential to salvation, and James shows that their sins produced confusion, tumult, and prejudice.

Go now to James 4:1-5. To whom was James writing? He was writing to a church congregation, and he asked this question:

James 4:1-5 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! [Here it probably means not necessarily those who actually committed the sex act, but rather they are adulterers and adulteresses in terms of their relations with the world.] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [The rivalry is right there.] Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

I recently read that the book of James was probably written and distributed in the mid AD 40s, and by the time James wrote this book much of the foolishness that we saw at the end of chapter 3 had already infiltrated into the church. It was brought into the church by its own membership, bringing it in from the world, and it was dividing the congregation in which the people were at war.

Let us go to Leviticus 23:26-32.

Leviticus 23:26-32 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. [This is serious business.] You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

In terms of meaning of each festival there are some parallels between Passover and the Day of Atonement, not in their specifics, but in their generality. Both portray the accomplishment of reconciliation, and the major difference is that Passover is very personal in its application, and Atonement (which of course has not been fulfilled) is worldwide in its application. We are observing, in one sense, what is the best known of God's festivals because of the Jews observance of it. However, on the other hand, along with the Last Great Day, it is the least understood, and partly because people are focused on the fasting that is commanded.

The world in general tends to look at this day as a curiosity. However, the Jews, who understand its meaning somewhat better, observe it as the most solemn day of the year—a recognition of its significance that it surely deserves, and they at least have a sense that it has a very meaningful application, but they do not understand much of what those meanings are.

Now for us, a festival is one that implies eating and drinking in its convivial atmosphere, but this day—the day of Atonement—is a festival *without* eating and drinking. There is a reason why people have trouble relating to this day. This day is the one above all others that Satan has driven to hide behind a smoke screen of mystifying silence. He would very much like to obliterate any knowledge of it, and he has almost succeeded.

We are going to look at a major point regarding Israel's worship of God. Recall that Israel did have some contact with God. We are going to go first to Hosea, and we will be looking here in a way at how well Satan has obliterated true knowledge of God.

Hosea 4:1 Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land:

Incidentally, this charge is being made against them probably within the last forty years before Israel was defeated by Assyria and went into captivity.

Hosea 4:1-2 Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed."

If you want to, someday you can compare Hosea with Amos. They were written fairly close to one another. We find in the book of Amos though that the people were worshipping regularly, but they were not doing so with right and true knowledge, and here is God making the charge about the same period of time Amos was preaching that there was no knowledge of God in the land, and Amos reinforces that.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

The people rejected truth, and that is why they did not have any true knowledge. It was not that God did not make it available. It was available. In another place God said that He sent prophet after prophet to tell them the truth, but they kept killing the prophets. They continued to be religious, they continued to have sacred services, but it was done without true knowledge.

What had happened was, as they rejected God's prophets and therefore the truth of God, the people themselves had strung bits and pieces of truth

together with paganism, and they thus created a toxic religious mixture that did not honor God one bit. If you would again study the other minor prophetic books like Amos, those books show that in spite of all the religious activity they were involved in, they were still separated from God.

That is the Old Testament. Let us go to the New Testament, and we will find from Paul's writings that nothing had changed. Almost 700 years had gone by since the writing of Hosea to the writing of the book of Romans, and we find Paul says the following in Romans 10:1-3:

Romans 10:1-3 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

They rejected God's truth—God's right way of doing things. What did Jesus say to the Pharisees? *"Full well you have rejected the commandments of God that you might keep your own tradition."* It is everywhere which bears record against these people.

They have a zeal for God. Now who better exemplifies that zeal than the Apostle Paul? He had a zeal for God; and in his misdirected zeal, that zeal so preoccupied his mind it drove him to perceive Christ and the Christians as enemies of the faith of his fathers. He was a primary example.

If we fast-forward to this day, to 2,000 years later, we can look around Israel—this portion of it anyway here in the United States—and we have a land that is dotted with many church buildings. I believe that most of the people who are attending there are truly sincere in their act of worship, but a true knowledge of God is still lacking.

The book of Romans reflects a belief of the Jews of their being incapable of justifying themselves before God on the basis of merit. Today's Israelites, by way of contrast, have gone completely in the other direction. Now just get the picture here. In Jesus' day and in Paul's day very many of the people were zealous in trying to keep the commandments as they understood them, but

they perverted them, as with the Sabbath and so forth. But they were zealous in doing the keeping of law as they understood them, as they were taught of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but they were at least zealous of law. Let us put it that way.

Now what do we have today? The modern Israelites have swung the pendulum completely the other way, and now everything is grace, and "you do not really have to pay attention to the law at all. Christ kept it for you. If He kept it for you, you do not need to worry about doing it," and yet there is still some measure of zeal for worshipping God. So great weight is put upon sincerity, and that is good.

They are at least sincere in their own mind, and I believe that sincerity and their misguided understanding of what is required of them actually keeps them from committing the unpardonable sin, and so they are doing what they are doing in ignorance. That is why Paul said he was forgiven because what he did he did in ignorance. The people today are doing what they are doing in ignorance, and they are sincere.

But if two people—God on this hand, and man on the other hand—God is following His way of life, and man is following his way of life that he is sincere about. You know very well that one of these days the path is going to part, and the sincerity will not move the person from his path over to God's path. It just will not happen. God says He is looking for people who worship Him in spirit and in truth. The sincerity that is exercised by these people is not in truth.

Let us look at Romans 11, because there is another factor we have to put in here.

Romans 11:1-5 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. [In effect Paul is saying, "I have been reconciled to God. He has not cast me off."] God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does

the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." [That is what God says, so He has not cast off Israel.] Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Paul is giving these people encouragement. These people are already in the church, and they needed to be encouraged about this, and so he says, "*Look, you have been called. You have been chosen. You are part of the remnant.*"

Drop down to verse 7. Now Paul looks backward again.

Romans 11:7-8 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect [the people to whom he is writing] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. [Here is that other factor.] Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

And brethren, it remains **to this day**. Reconciliation with God is still open to them. Atonement with God is open to them. David adds to what Paul was saying.

Romans 11:9-10 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

The table to which David was referring was not a literal table with food on it, but the spiritual table that has spiritual food on it. The spiritual food they were eating which was going into their mind and becoming part of their heart, part of their character, and what they were making decisions based upon, was largely paganism, and so their spiritual diet was destroying them.

Now what is it that enables Satan to deceive mankind? Part of it we have already seen, and that is that God has lifted His mind, hand, finger, or whatever you want to say, to only work through a very small number of people—the remnant, the elect—and the rest He simply does not intervene in their lives to give them truth in such a way by means of His spirit so that

they would understand. He just leaves them in their unconverted state so that later on, as we understand in the Last Great Day, they will have their opportunity for salvation.

One of the things Paul is pointing out here is to give encouragement to those of us who are in the church that God has indeed given us an awesome gift that He has not given to very many people on this Earth, so Satan has that to work with. God simply has not intervened as He is going to do later on during the Millennium, and then on into the Last Great Day. So the people are already in a position in which there is some degree of blindness, and this has enabled Satan to deceive the whole world.

We find in II Corinthians 4 there is even one more indication of what God has done.

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.

The word "veiled" here is parallel to the word "stupor" which we read in Romans 11.

Satan is not done with his work. He is working with people who are veiled, who are in somewhat of a stupor.

I want you to go back to Genesis 3, verses 1 through 5 where we have one of these "firsts," and from it we can lift a gigantic principle that gives understanding. Listen to what Satan says. Think about what Satan says.

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?'" [Satan throws out a truth.] 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 [God never said 'nor shall you touch it'], lest you die.'" [So now she shows she is open to

something from Satan because she misquoted. She added something to what it shows God actually said.] Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [Here came a direct lie.] 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 can be like God! All I have to do is eat this fruit, and I am benefited thereby." Satan put it before her, and the two of them (Adam and Eve) jumped at it. So what does this tell us? Genesis 3:1-5 provides substantiation that Satan deceives through a faulty and spotty education that contains just enough truth within it to make his misdirection seem plausible. He is a wonderful salesman, but the result was, in this case, a forcible separation from God which in turn has led to every horrible moral and spiritual degeneration.

Adam and Eve were a test case and an example for all of mankind, and God determined, as is shown beginning in Romans 12:5, that as they responded, so would all of mankind. His judgment was correct. We have all sinned. We have no justification whatever for saying in our pride that we have not done so. God has all of mankind dead to rights, including us, because all of us have rejected God's truth out of hand when confronted by it. Even now, even after having it revealed to us, we wrestle with it when our flesh or mind sets itself to defy the law and rule of God.

One of the major lessons of this day is that, like it or not, pride is at the foundation perhaps of all sin. Virtually all, anyway. It is pride that motivates us to reject God's commands. It is pride that makes us stiffnecked and hardheaded. It leads us to say, "Well, here is the way *I* see it." It moves us to think that there is a better way, a short cut, for our desires of the moment. "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" Pride is even at the root of our ignorance because it leads us to not see God, because, after all, who needs Him?

I just had a commentary last week where the man said, "*God is not necessary. Who needs Him? The creation can create itself as long as there is a law of gravity.*" That is what that learned man said.

When we add to this that mankind's first sin involved food, it adds an interesting dimension to this day. Food plays a major role in our life. First of all, we greatly desire it because it tastes good, and added to that is that without it we die. It is a necessity for life.

Is it possible that God commanded fasting on this day to remind us of that, and to make us understand that we can humble ourselves to sacrifice something so needed for life, and that fasting shows us we can control our drive, our passion, and our desires to submit even in a life-threatening circumstance? Jesus did it for 40 days. Elijah did it for 40 days. Samuel fasted for 21 days. Moses fasted for 40 days twice! If those men could do it, why cannot we fast for one day? It gives you some sort of an idea of how merciful God is. He only requires one day a year, but in other places in the Bible He encourages us through these examples to fast more times by voluntarily doing it.

There is only one time in the year that we are to eat unleavened bread. It is only one time in the year that we are to be in booths, but each of these occasions has a tremendously valuable lesson within it. He is not a God who puts His people through agony willingly on an occasion such as this.

Brethren, we can control ourselves with the help of God, and if we are willing to give up food, which is an absolutely necessary thing for life and a sense of well-being, cannot we stop ourselves from sinning over something that is just our pleasure for the moment? We can. That is the lesson that goes with fasting on this day. Food played a part in the first sin. Denying food plays a part in coming out of sin.

What is it we have to do as our part of being at one with God? We have to submit to Him. It is a simple statement, but it is not always easy, but it is what we have to do in the keeping of our part of the covenant.

The Bible contains some very succinct advise in what it is that keeps us from submitting. It is pride, but here is what we need to do.

Notice how this section begins.

James 4:6-7 But He gives more grace. [Grace is not only the forgiveness of sin, it also stands for all the gifts of God by which He enables us to keep His commands.] Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

There is an awful lot there which we will not go into at this time.

I Peter 5:5-9 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud But gives grace to the humble." 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. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

Our part in settling the disagreements with, and therefore the separation from God, is to be humble before Him. Why humility? Because it requires a beating down of pride that springs forth to make us seek our pleasure through sin. Why submit to God in humility? Because what God tells us to do is right. God is right in everything, and that is something that the great bulk of Israel simply would not do. They responded with hard heads and stiff necks, and both of those terms in biblical imagery portray resistance to God.

Let us go to Philippians 2, and we will finish on this example from Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death

of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is our example—someone who is much, much higher than we are in every way, but He submitted to God in everything. He Himself gave testimony that He always did whatever pleased the Father. All the time He did that. Fasting is just a reminder that we are humbling ourselves. If we will humble ourselves all through our lifetime, we will be exalted just as Jesus Christ has been, because we too will be pointing our direction in life to submitting to God in everything.