

Snares

Spiritual Traps

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Have you ever been tricked by a false advertisement that caused you to make a really bad purchasing decision? In your heart of hearts, you knew better; but you justified it, in any number of ways. Then, after you brought the product home, and you had the payment book in your hand, you said, "Why did I ever do that? I was flimflammed. I was tricked into buying this."

Years ago, when I was a young man in Oakland, California, there was a man that had a truly clever AD . He put the advertisement in *The Oakland Tribune*. It said: "This is the last chance to send your dollar in. P.O. Box 1234." (Or whatever the number was.) Thousands of people sent in their dollar. They had been **snares** by this clever advertisement—which seemed to promise something but, in reality, offered nothing. It left the sender poorer by a dollar, the cost of a postage stamp, and the envelope. I remember that they tried to prosecute the man, but I'm not sure that they made it stick. They probably should have prosecuted the people who sent him their dollar as not being too bright.

I was in sales for a number of years, and when anybody would hear that I was a salesman, the first thing they thought of was, "*He's out to trick me,*" or "*He's out to get me*" because salesmen rank with politicians (or with people like that) today. So I learned, early on, that I would change my presentation from the canned presentation that the company had. I would put together a very honest, straightforward presentation with complete product guarantees. I knew that was the way that God would want it done. And because of that, I think, I was successful; and I really enjoyed my thirty-seven years of selling.

I realize that there is nothing new under the sun today, and that there have always been flimflam artists that have tried to separate us from our money. But, it seems that this skill with the stock market, with the shenanigans that can go on, has reached awesome heights.

Today we have the "bait and switch" scheme. Our younger son, Garrett, bought a car at an auction. On this car were brand new wheels and brand new tires. But, when he went to pick the car up, there were no new wheels and no new tires on that car. Instead, there were old and chewed up wheels and tires.

The **snare** (or the attraction, or the bait) happened to be the tires and the wheels—which just happened to make the car look good. And for Garrett, it took much time (in court, in legwork, and in about five months of just diligently pursuing this man) to finally get his wheels and tires. The man was a crook; and he was consummate in what he did, in cheating his customers.

Today we have the Ponzi schemes. One is the investment swindle, where the **snare** (or the bait) is the promise of high profits from some fictitious source. Yet people taken in by this scheme can just "see" themselves getting rich. But, of course, it operates this way—the "high profits" come from the current investors. That is, the current investors are paid off by the funds that are acquired from the investors that come after them. When there aren't any more investors, the whole thing falls apart; and everybody goes to jail and you are out of your money.

SNARES (which is what the subject of the sermon is today) such as these, and many more types than I could possibly count, rely on two major factors. (1) There must be **bait** to make us walk into the snare, or fall into the trap. And (2) the snare, or the trap, itself must be hidden—that **the end result**, which the snare will produce, **will not readily be seen**.

The definition of the word *snare* is sort of interesting. This is from the *American Standard Dictionary* : (1) something that leads to a place, or situation, from which escape is difficult. The synonyms are trap, lure, and bait. (2) To gain control of, or advantage over, as if by trapping. The synonyms for that would be catch, trap, enmesh or tangle, to put something in your path to cause you to stumble.

The word *trap* means a stratagem for catching, or tricking, an unwary person. "A concealed pit" is what they put down. *Ambush* is the act of laying wait to surprise by attack; an attack made from a concealed position; hidden, danger, or peril. All of these give an overall sense of what a snare (or a trap, or an ambush) is—or, what can be waiting for us.

Unger's Bible Dictionary (as pertaining to *snare*) says,

A net, or a trap, especially of the fowler; also such as seizes man and beast. Snares were set in the path or hidden in the ground. In the figurative sense, a snare is used for anything that may be the cause of injury or destruction.

In the society that we live in, the world is confronted by many snares that can bring harm to the average individual: credit cards, spending beyond our means, addictions of all sorts. These—and many more—are a real danger to mankind in general, and to **us** as well. They can lead man (and/or **us**) to physical problems, or to difficult lifestyles—and may even bring death.

But for **us** (those called by God), there are **snares** laid by for them that can bring a far greater penalty. To be sure, those who suffer the penalty of the mistakes they make in this world, they will have a chance to learn from those mistakes. And they will have a chance to learn the right way to live. But even though **we** (who are called by God) have mercy and forgiveness extended to us, this is **our one and only chance** to learn to live our lives with carefulness, and with wisdom—making our decisions based on the Word of God.

To set the stage for this sermon, I'd like to have you turn over to I Peter 5:8-9. This is a very familiar scripture, because it pertains to Satan.

I Peter 5:8-9 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith [in trusting God], knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in [experienced by] your brethren that are in the world.

Satan very rarely destroys by a frontal attack. Satan has the world. Therefore, it is *us* that he is after—those who are called by God, that have a chance to be a member of the God Family. He is a master at ambushes, at snares, and at traps. Thus, for *us*, this is where *we* have to look for him.

Albert Barnes made, I thought, a very adequate comment on this particular scripture. It goes as follows:

When error comes in; when seductive arts abound; when the world allures and charms the representation of the character of the foe is not of the roaring lion, but of the silent influence of an enemy that has clothed himself in the garb of an angel of light.

He said that you have to have your head on right, to be watching for what's coming to you. So, I'd like to have you turn back to Genesis 3; and we'll look at the first example of Satan applying a **snare**—to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:1-8 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die: For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desire to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

I'd like to look at this, as to just what Satan did here. First of all, this was the brand new creation that God was putting together. And it was vital to Satan's plan that he corrupts the creation that God was making—to make man in His image. Because of this, he pulled out all of the stops; and he brought out the big guns: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Remembering the rules for the **snare**, or the trap, Satan knew that what he said would have to only present what was positive. Also, that he would completely cover any hint of the disaster that was sure to follow. Now, notice how he sets his trap. No startling request to disobey God, no persuasion, no advise—just a simple question to provoke the mind *to question God's commands*. "*Has God said that you shall not eat of every tree in the garden?*" Satan put his feeler out—for what he suspects is a weak point in Eve's faith. It hints at something mysterious.

Was God unkind, or holding something back from them? Why was any tree withheld?

And Eve responds very innocently, "*We may eat of 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 told us, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.*"

Now, just as Satan plants wrong thoughts and concepts concerning God in our minds today, he now planted a wrong thought pattern in Eve's mind as well. Satan now boldly plants the concept in Eve's mind that will **cause her to see** the tree, its fruit, and the results produced by eating this fruit **in a way that she has never seen before**.

Before Satan came on the scene, Adam and Eve trusted God. God said, "*My children, don't eat of the tree in the midst of the garden; because it will cost you your life.*" And they were completely obedient. "*God said that. Fine, we won't touch it.*" But now Satan tells Eve something different: "*You*

most assuredly will not die. Don't you understand that God knows that if you eat the fruit of this tree, that your mind will be opened as His is? And you will understand what God knows. You'll be able to discern what is good and evil for yourself. You'll be just like God."

But Satan was careful not to point out what disobedience would bring. That was the hidden part of the trap that he was laying. In that one instant, Eve's perspective of the tree completely changed! All of a sudden, she **saw** that the tree was beautiful (the lust of the eyes), and the fruit just looked delicious (the lust of the flesh). And the thought of becoming wise as God is wise—or, perhaps, even wiser than God; well, that would be absolutely wonderful. (And that was the pride of life.)

Eve, as Satan wanted her to, only saw the pleasure, the supposed good and the supposed great wisdom that was available to her; and, in doing so, she completely **bought the lie**. She took the steps that were to cause her, her husband, and all of mankind to suffer the consequences of her disobedience throughout all the following generations of man.

I don't know what, specifically, went through Eve's mind. Perhaps she just viewed death as being separated from God? But then, that would be all right; because she would have all that knowledge and could do as she pleased. God gave Adam and Eve all of the knowledge that they really needed to know; but that wasn't enough. Now you see, they wanted to be like God, or to surpass God (and that certainly was what Satan wanted)—although they weren't remotely ready for that. Rather than humble themselves under the teaching of God, they wanted to live their own way, making their own rules (just as man does today). He rejects the truth of God; and he wants to go his own way, apart from God.

What was the result? Here comes *the penalty* part of the trap laid by Satan. They saw what they had never seen before—that they were naked, and that they were stripped of all the wonderful excellence that God had given them. And they lost their innocence. Their mind was clouded. Their judgment was confused. And all notions of godly character had been taken away.

In a single moment, they became fearful of their Creator and they hid. The trap had finally sprung and there was no turning back. They were caught. I'm sure that Adam and Eve thought that, with the knowledge of good and evil, they would be able to choose to live the way they saw as being good. Instead, because of their disobedience, they were forced to live the evil way (the difficult way); and this world has been living that way of evil ever since.

Brethren, it should be evident that Satan hasn't changed his tactics over all these years. He gets a good thing going, and he knows it works; and he doesn't change.

In the early part of the Church of the Great God, in the first couple of years, (in fact, many came to John in the first year) there were forty-one requests to change doctrine. They had discovered something "new."

We had a sermonette this morning on scholarship. And these people had come to "scholarship;" and they had decided that Mr. Armstrong was wrong. We had several who thought that God's people didn't have to tithe until their homes were paid for. The reason they felt this way was that they felt God had given Israel the Promised Land. Of course, Israel had to dispossess the nations. But, being that God gave Israel the Promised Land, then they felt that (until their homes were paid for) they didn't have to tithe. And this was *false scholarship*.

Of course, if you read it, then you had to tithe. So it was interesting. But they didn't stop to think what that would produce in the church. There would be no hook-up, no publication. There would be only one paid pastor—and that would be John—because that was all the offerings would bring in. (They felt that you could give offerings, but that tithing was wrong.) The **snare** captured their mind, and they couldn't see what it would do to the church.

We had a group who were wise in their own thinking; and they felt that they weren't observing the new moons correctly, as they pertain to God's holy days. And though they couldn't all agree what constituted a new moon, they left; and they had their Feast in Oregon. They then started their Feast on three different days, and they concluded their Feast on three different days—because they couldn't agree as to which particular moon was correct. Later, they did away with the Ten Commandments—because they had arrived at the "fact" that (they thought) they were negative.

We had groups that rejected the way that we conducted Passover, individuals who rejected the hierarchical government of God, etc. And in all of this, *they never saw the snare that Satan had laid for them*. As far as I know, they have all left the church and gone their own way.

What was **the snare** for them? It was *the pride of life*—as it was with Adam and Eve. To a degree it was *vanity, self-aggrandizement, and the desire to govern themselves*. That is, freedom from church government. It was freedom to come to their own conclusions—not being bound by the teaching of God's apostle, or by the ministry. Of course, once trapped, *the penalty was that they left the church of God*. What a terrible penalty!

Satan isn't glued to just that one concept. He doesn't just work on our thinking and vanity. He also works on our *lusts*. Let's turn over to Proverbs 7. This is something that is pretty prevalent today.

Proverbs 7:1-4 My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with you. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them upon your fingers, write them upon the tables of your heart. Say unto wisdom, You are my sister; and call understanding your kinswoman.

It was sort of cute, because on commentator said, "It is one thing for wisdom to find entrance into the heart. It is another thing for it to be welcome there." There's a lot of truth in that.

Proverbs 7:6-7 For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and I beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding.

He wasn't familiar with the ways of the world; and he was going to go out and do something that wasn't wise.

Proverbs 7:8-9 Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night.

So here you are seeing a young man that shouldn't have been in that part of town. He should have been home in bed. And he didn't understand the concept that you can only get so close to sin before it pulls you in. That is a truism—especially concerning sex, which is what this is about.

Proverbs 7:10-11 And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her own house.)

Here he meets a **snare**—the attractive woman, dressed provocatively. Many of our styles today are designed by dress designers to dress women for power—which means that they dress them in tight clothes and short skirts. This is how this woman was dressed. In course, in our society, the **trap** of illicit sex is everywhere. It's in what we watch, and in what we read.

Proverbs 7:12-15 Now is she without, now in the streets, and lies in wait at every corner. So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me today; this day have I paid my vows. Therefore came I forth to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you.

Of course, this poor man (and this could be anybody—a man or a woman) just fell for it, right off the bat.

Proverbs 7:16-22 I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: He has taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goes after her straightway, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.

So here we see she was forward, she was easy, she was flirting, she conveyed that he was the only one; and he succumbed to it. He could see her beauty and picture the delight that he was going to have. That's what **he saw**—the wonderful **pleasure** that he was going to enjoy. **Did he see the penalty? No, he didn't.**

Proverbs 7:23 Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life.

He doesn't consider the steps that he is taking. The term "liver" here is the seat of energy and vitality. So, what it is saying is that she is sapping his energy and vitality; and he is mortally doomed.

The subject here is just what it seems to be. It's a man foolishly going in to a woman of the night. However, in a broad sense, it can be applied to *obeying only the wisdom of God* and *staying away from false teaching completely*. In fact, we aren't even to get close to it. (This is repeated in Proverbs 2:10-22 and Proverbs 9:13-18.)

Frank Simkins gave a message at the Feast, and it was excellent—on "As You Sow, So Shall You Reap." So God has seen to it that we have examples of men who have succumbed to this **snare**, and the penalties that followed after the pleasure. We won't turn to II Samuel 13:11-14, but that is the story of Amnon and Tamar. Amnon was the young man who decided that he had to have Absalom's sister, Tamar. He wanted his pleasure, and he raped her. Amnon saw only his perverted lust; and he strove to fulfill it. He never saw the penalty that was coming.

Absalom was very cagey, and he waited for two years; but, when the opportunity came, he had his men fall on Amnon and kill him. You see—Amnon only saw his perverted lust and what he wanted. He didn't stop to consider the price he would pay for that satisfaction.

II Kings 11:1-11 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, You shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.

Solomon's philandering, in a sense, cost him the kingdom. It all seemed so wonderful in the beginning—all these women. What bad results could come from that? *"After all, I'm the king."* It was so enjoyable. But now the penalty came—after the trap was closed—and he lost the kingdom.

II Samuel 11:1-5 And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

Now comes the penalty.

II Samuel 12:8-14 And Nathan said to David, You are the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto you such and such things [whatever else you needed]. Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have

slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. [Here comes the punishment. #1] Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house; because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, [#2] I will raise up evil against you out of your own house [#3] and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them unto your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. For you did it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD . And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Howbeit, because of this deed [Here's #4.] you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, [Then, #5.] the child also that is born unto you shall surely die.

Here's the penalty. And, if you were to read II Samuel 16:20-22, you'll see where David's concubines were slept with in the full sight of Israel. In II Samuel 18:7, twenty thousand men were slain because of David's adultery with Bathsheba. You see, brethren, God was teaching *a great lesson* to the man who would rule over all Israel in the Kingdom of God. And He's giving us an example that we can learn from as well.

In II Samuel 18:27-33 is when David finds out that his son, Absalom, is dead. And he weeps, and he sorrows, and he cries—because he realizes that this all came from him giving in to the sin with Bathsheba.

One more example is here, in Acts 5:1-11. *Satan places traps carefully, and attractively* .

Acts 5:1-11 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to 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 to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all of them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried your husband are at the door, and shall carry you out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the spirit: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

What was the **snare** in this case? What was the trap? Was it not wanting to look converted and giving (as were the rest of the brethren) while all the time hedging their bets to keep a big piece of the money—to keep a big piece of their wealth? Had they been up front about what they were doing, there would have been no penalty; but *the desire to look righteous while lying* (and thereby becoming unrighteous) brought the penalty of death.

Now, brethren, what causes us to be like this, and to do these things? Jeremiah 17:9, in good part, is the answer.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

I'm going to quote from *Adam Clarke's Commentary* on this, because I think he does about the best job there is.

the heart is supplanting [Meaning it wants to do away with what is correct, by treachery and scheming.]-tortuous [Is twisted with many bends.] -full of windings-insidious;" [It's subtle, cunning, deceitful, treacherous to ambush. It lies in wait to attack.] lying ever at the catch [wanting to catch its owners]; striving to avail itself of every favourable circumstance to gratify its propensities to pride, ambition, evil desire, and corruption of all kinds. [Nobody wants to hear this. And it is desperately wicked. It is unstable.] ... [Who can know it?] It even hides itself from itself; so that its owner does not know it. A corrupt heart is the worst enemy the fallen creature can have; it is full of evil devices,-of deceit, of folly, and abomination; and its owner knows not what is in him till it boils over, and is often past remedy before the evil is perceived.

James 1:14 backs this up (perhaps not as eloquently).

James 1:14 But every man [or woman] is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

James is saying that the source of all temptation in man is *himself*. It is true, that external inducements, he said, to sin may be placed in front of him; but there be no force in them if there was not something in men (a certain thinking, or desire) that they could align with.

It's interesting, here, that the word "enticed" has the meaning of being trapped, of being held fast, beguiled or led into it. A person is lead into it; and, all of a sudden, he falls into sin. It's a **snare**. It suddenly springs upon him.

It would seem to us sometimes as if our own heart lies in ambush to just waylay us. Am I saying that the people of God are totally evil and unstable? No, I'm not—because I know that we are all trying to overcome. We are working hard.

Some might say that Adam Clarke was overly harsh in his explanation of that verse, and that our hearts couldn't be that evil; and, yet, Adam and Eve (the perfect creations of God, with perfect health and wonderful minds given to them) immediately succumbed to Satan's prompting. Solomon, the wisest man ever born, who completely knew what God expected of him (whom God had come to twice, personally), did just the opposite of what God commanded him; and he lost his kingdom. And David, a man after God's own heart (who wrote the Psalms and loved God with every fiber of his being) crumpled like a beginner when he saw Bathsheba. And he brought on total sorrow on Uriah's family, the death of his own two sons, and the cost of 20,000 people. Ananias and Sapphira, who were probably up to that moment pretty good church members (probably in good standing), gave in to greed.

What did all these individuals have in common? They justified what they were about to do in their minds. It may have taken just a moment to make that decision—as with Adam and Eve. It may have been planned, or organized, over a period of time—such as with Amnon and his planned rape of Tamar. It may have slowly crept into the lifestyle, over the years—as it did with Solomon. And one

wrong deed after another may have been justified, over and over, to cover the guilt—as with David. But the results were the same. They all justified what they did.

Now, can we sit here and say that our minds don't work the same way? I can't. Our minds, and our thinking, and our way of living, is **what we have to OVERCOME**. That's why we are here. That's why we are the firstfruits. Over all of the years that I have lived, I have to say that I have wrongly justified many things that I have done. When I wanted something badly enough, my mind (or my human nature) would rush to approve it. That is, to find some way that I could obtain it—even if it meant that I was thoughtless, selfish, and compromised the character that God wanted me to have.

Why do we have such a difficult time with our nature? Turn with me to Galatians 5, please. I think that we have to see the enemy, we have to understand it, and we have to be able to fight against it.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would.

Now, does that mean that you don't do anything? Of course not!

Galatians 5:18-21 But if you be led by the Spirit [and that's one of the keys], you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery [We've already seen that.], fornication [which we've seen], uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife [which we'll see], seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

We may not have all of these things; but this is part of what our human nature is. And the lesson is, brethren, that *we can't trust our human nature*. To understand that is **the key for overcoming**.

Brethren, we can even **abuse** one of the greatest blessings that God has given us—and then justify it. Let's turn over to Matthew 18. This, of course, is the chapter we always go to—concerning *forgiveness* .

Matthew 18:23-24 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

In the first part of verse 23, here the "kingdom of heaven" has reference to the church—or, to the way that God will deal with His people. *"It shall be, in My church, as it was with a certain king."* Or, God will deal with church members, as did this certain king. This is the message that He is trying to get across. Now, the king had set a time aside to settle up with his servants regarding the responsibilities that had been given to them. In this instance, it had to do with revenue that was due to the king.

Matthew 18:24-25 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

One of the men, who had been made a servant to the king, was found to owe (probably, with inflation) somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty million dollars—a sum that he could never ever

pay. And the king, then, commanded that the debtor, his wife, his family (and everything that he had) were to be sold—that payment might be made.

Matthew 18:26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.

The servant, who owed the debt, fell down in a humble, respectful, and repentant attitude. He begged the king to have patience with him. And he broke down in tears before the king, and he asked forgiveness. *"My family, my children. Please, spare me. Please."*

Matthew 18:27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

The king was moved, and he had tremendous pity on him. He'd been moved, by his pleading. He noticed the distress in his voice, and the sincerity, and the desire to turn it around; and he pitied his family. He didn't just extend the payments so he could pay it later—he *completely forgave* it. There was no payment at all! He was forgiven.

Of course, this represents *us*—as we come before God the Father in all of our sins. We have owed God our very life, for all the sins we have committed. And there wasn't any way that we, of ourselves, could pay what we owed. We owed a sum that was impossible—impossible to pay. There was no payment that we could give. But then, God, in His awesome mercy, paid the tremendous price for us—by accepting the death of His Son, for us.

One would think that, with the wonderful forgiveness that has been given to us, we would (in turn) **extend that same forgiveness to others**. Forgiveness is a great blessing—but what we do with the forgiveness can be a different matter. When *we* desperately need forgiveness, the pressure is on us; and we repent. We walk lightly in all that we do. We are careful to get our prayers in, and our studies in. We are careful to be humble; and we carefully humble ourselves before others and before God. In short, we do everything that we can to be approved by God. We are conscience of every flaw, of every sin, of every weakness that we have.

But once the pressure is off, we feel great relief. And, if we aren't very careful, Satan can place a **snare** in our thinking. It goes something like this: We give ourselves permission, or we justify ourselves, to go right back into our old lifestyle (little by little)—giving in to the same sins, and taking the *forgiveness* that has been extended to us for granted.

I can't help but think of a salesman. A salesman makes a big bonus, or he makes a good size bonus every quarter. Now, he had to work hard for that bonus. But, once he gets the bonus, what does he do? He quits working. *"I'm rich. I've got my bonus."* And he lets off, he slows down, until he starts to feel the pinch again; and then he repents and gets back to work.

This is exactly what took place here. Jesus Christ gave this specific parable, and specifically the subject of the parable—not just to have a cute little story with a principle. He gave this because this is what our natures are really like (as will be shown by the remainder of the parable that we have here).

Matthew 18:28-30 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence [which was about \$50.00]: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me all that you owe me. And his fellowservant

fell down at his feet, and besought him [You can almost picture the man, down on his knees, with tears—just like the other servant had done.], saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

This same servant, who had been forgiven his tremendous debt, came across this poor servant that owed him money. And he learned nothing from experience (that he had just experienced). The first servant had probably always conducted himself in this manner; and *the lesson of his forgiveness* was never translated into a change in his conduct! Jesus is saying that this should **not** be done in our case, at all. That we should learn from the forgiveness that has been given to us.

Also, Jesus Christ is showing us that relatively small offenses are committed against us by comparison to *the great offense* that we have committed against God. Therefore, because of that, we should always be willing to forgive. And yet Satan can motivate our human nature to act as a **snare** to us—causing us (1) to be unthankful and forgetful of the forgiveness given to us, and (2) to continue to be judgmental and unforgiving to other people.

Matthew 18:30-35 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. [This is Jesus Christ speaking. This isn't somebody else.] Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired [asked] me: Should not you also have had compassion on your fellowservant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was wroth [angry], and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. [Now, here is how He is going to conduct Himself with us.] So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Put simply, Jesus makes it plain that *if* we don't forgive others, *then* He won't forgive us. It's it in a nutshell. [Some words are lost when the tape is turned over.] ...of the Kingdom of God is peace, forgiveness, and loving your neighbor.

In Romans 7—the apostle Paul, who had been in the church somewhere between twenty and twenty-five years at this time, said:

Romans 7:21-25 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord [that I will be delivered]. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh [I serve] the law of sin.

Paul knew that he would have to *fight himself* until the very day he dropped, until he was changed into spirit being. He also knew that Jesus Christ would save him. And we can have that assurance as well. But are we just to sit back with the attitude that we'll be saved by Jesus Christ, so we can wait to overcome? Well, that wasn't the apostle Paul's attitude.

We won't turn here, today, but you can read this in I Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul put his mind (and his body) under **discipline** that he might not be disqualified—because he knew that was required. We have to do that! We have to control our mind, and our body.

What lurks to **snare** us today? What attributes, what qualities, plague us (that Satan can take advantage of)? Anger, jealousy, racial prejudice, wrong lusts of all sorts, pride, hatreds, envy, fear, lack of love for others—all of these things can be used by Satan to bring us out of control.

Indeed, there are physical steps that we can take to work with all of these things. We can flee fornication. We can be like Joseph, and we can run away from sin. But is there something that would help us to nip the pulls to do these things in the bud, as they strike us? Is there an example of how to fend off these **snares**, that Satan so willingly tempts us with, before they can get a hold of us? The answer is, "Yes, there is;" but it requires *discipline* on our part. It also requires *thinking* on our part—and that we won't be lackadaisical in our calling as a Christian.

Turn over to Matthew 4. This is the tempting of Jesus Christ. With this, we can see how He handled these things. Jesus was to be tempted by Satan. And, just as His nature was being tested to see if He could be drawn away from His Father's truth (His Father's way of living) by being tempted with evil, so we too are being tested and tempted in the same way. It should encourage you to think about that.

Matthew 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

The devil is the Adversary, being full of subtlety. In Ephesians 6, he is referred to as wily—setting traps. He is full of envy and hatred. And this is the one who is doing the tempting.

Matthew 18:2-4 When he [Christ] had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

The first snare (or, trap): "IF you are God's Son, then you have the power to work miracles. And here's a fit opportunity for you to do just that—to work a miracle and try your power out, to show us that you are from God." He was tempting Him to use His Sonship in a way that was inconsistent with what God wanted from Him. "Here you are, cast out. You are alone. You are needy. You are poor. And yet you call yourself 'the Son of God.' And if you have this power, how easy it would be for you to satisfy your needs. What's wrong with that? How foolish is it, then, for 'the Son of God'—having all this power—to go hungry (to be starving) when a word from you would show us the great power you have in relieving your hunger?"

Now, here was Jesus' response (and this is what **we** have to take note of). "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3—the proper scripture to respond to Satan. He was saying that it wasn't necessary that He would have to perform a miracle to live—because that depends upon the will of His Father. His Father could say support life by other means.

Now, *the second snare* .

Then the devil takes him up into the holy city, and sets him on a pinnacle of the temple.
6 And saith unto him, If you be the Son of God, cast yourself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. (Matthew 4:5-6)

I believe that this was Psalm 91. Satan's challenge was *"Throwing yourself down 700 feet, to the valley below, and surviving without harm, will completely prove that you are who you say you are."* Once again, Jesus properly responded to Satan by a text (or, a scripture) that expressly forbids what Satan had instructed Him to do. The meaning was this: You shall not try God.

[In verse 7, here's what Jesus replied to this second snare that Satan set.]

Matthew 4:7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.

He said, *"It would be wrong to put myself in danger, on a whim, just to test My Father's care for Me—unless I was commanded to do so. Otherwise to do so, and then to appeal to God for help, would be trifling with all of God's promises for Me."*

Now Satan, who was trying to trick Him, was confounded and repelled by the scriptures—which were rightly used and expounded by Jesus Christ.

The third snare :

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil takes him up into an exceeding high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and said unto him, All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

The third snare was interesting, because all of these dominions were Satan's to give Christ right now. He could immediately begin to help the people that were suffering. *"No sacrifice, no torture, no waiting—it's all yours right this minute. You can have it all right now."* Satan promised to put Him in possession of it **at once!** There would be no difficulty IF Christ would acknowledge him [Satan] as the proper lord—the one who could dispose of that land, and that property, to Him. That is, IF He would trust him, rather than His Father.

The other temptation had been, perhaps, a little bit more logical. If you are hungry, what's wrong with having bread? If you fall, what's wrong with being saved? There's nothing wrong with that. (Still, it was a violation of the spirit—even in those temptations.) But the third attempt was greater; and it struck at the righteousness, and the faith, of Jesus Christ. Would He stay with His Father? Here, Satan proposes that Jesus worship him—instead of God the Father. But Jesus' response is right from scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13). *"You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."*

Now, Albert Barnes had some pretty good comments on this; and I think it applies to us. The first one was that Satan often takes advantage of our circumstances (our needs, and our desires) in his

temptation of us. He approached Jesus Christ when He was, supposedly, weak and hungry. As it relates to us, he approaches us when we are weak, or depressed, and likely to complain, or likely to be tempted. He knows **when** to attack his enemy.

Secondly, sometimes Satan's temptations are often strongest after we have been shown favor—because our guard is down. We've been blessed in some way. Jesus had been called 'the Son of God,' and Satan took this opportunity to test Him. Satan often attempts to fill us with pride and with vain self-deceit—when we have been favored with any peace of mind (or any new view of God). He urges us to let down with something that is going to bring us into sin.

The third thing that Barnes commented on is that Satan's temptations are plausible. They often seem to be only urging us to do what is good and proper. They seem even to urge us to promote the glory of God and to honor Him. But we are not to think that, because a thing may seem good in itself, it therefore has to be done. Some of the most powerful temptations of Satan occur when he seems to be urging us to do what shall be for the glory of God. (I couldn't help but think of the Crusades, which slaughtered everybody—in the name of God.)

The thing here is that Jesus Christ justified His actions not by His own thinking, but only **by His Father's Word**. In other words, that was the basis of how He conducted Himself. Does God give *us* specific instructions, to help us in this area? You bet He does! You see, brethren, we are *the firstfruits of God's creation*. **We are to go on to perfection; and we are to do so by learning to use God's Word to change the very way we think, and the way we act.** That's exactly WHY WE ARE HERE.

Turn over to Proverbs 4, and we'll see the first example that God wants us to have. (At least, the first one that I put down today, anyway.) To me, this is really a very important one.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

One of the commentaries, some time back, said that guarding the heart is more important than guarding national defense. It is the most important thing that we can do. Why? Because it is out of your heart that all of your actions proceed. It is out of your heart that we justify, or don't justify, what we do. It is exceedingly important that you **guard your heart**.

Proverbs 4:24-27 Put away from you a forward mouth, and perverse lips put far from you. Let your eyes look right on, and let your eyelids look straight before you [not getting sidetracked by the allures of this world]. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove your foot from evil.

Stay on the path that God has for you. Consider, carefully, where you direct your life.

Matthew 10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

A dove, before God, is totally open and innocent. But, for the serpent part, we are in this world; and a serpent is wise. A serpent will run from trials, troubles, and confrontations. So He is saying to be open before God, but use wisdom to avoid sin and the ways of this world.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation [conduct] be as it becomes the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

The apostle Paul is speaking here. And what he is saying is that, in every aspect of our lives, we should be attempting to live as perfectly as possible—before God, and our fellow man.

II Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations [margin, reasonings], and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

We are to be casting down every wrong imagination that is against the way of God and be bringing every one of our thoughts into captivity. This is what is required of us; and we have to use God's Word to do this. And then Paul goes on to say that we are to be careful about what we are to allow in our mind, in our eyesight, in our hearing, in our dress, in our lifestyle. We are to measure **all that we do** against the Word of God. *There is a way of living that is appropriate to the gospel. That is the way that we should strive for.*

How careful are we to be?

I Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Not even to get close to it! And it is this **continuous practice**, brethren, at **living God's Way** that will greatly reduced our chance of every being trapped, or snared. It is this **continuous practice** that will build the character that God, so very much, wants in us—to sanctify us.

Where do we start?

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be you not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

"To walk circumspectly," means to watch where you place your feet. Examine each piece of ground before you take a step. Take special care not to be involved in the temptations that are around you, in the world.

We are to "redeem the time," or to buy back the wasted time. We are to rescue time, in a sense, from being squandered—by using it properly, because the days are evil; and that we might show true wisdom and be really working to understand what the will of God is. All of this is **our defense** against justifying the wrong thing, and against being trapped.

Are we all going to live our lives perfectly, from this point on? I wish I could say that I was; but I know that we will all make mistakes, in spite of our efforts not to.

Now, what do we do when we find ourselves snared, or trapped? I mentioned this subject to John Ritenbaugh, prior to my putting this together. And he said that he had just heard a man talking on the

radio. He was a trapper; and he set **snares** for animals (about dog size). One of the callers-in said, "Well, aren't you afraid of catching a domestic animal (a domestic dog)?" And he said, "No, I am not." When asked, "Why not?" (Because they had heard that, when a wild animal is trapped, it will chew off its leg—to get out of the trap). But he replied, "Domestic animals are not like that. They are accustomed to being helped by their masters." Thus, if he snares a dog, it will lay there—waiting for its owner to come, and take it out of the trap.

Taking the principle for this, the domestic dog is accustomed to looking to his master for help. Thus, he will wait for help to come (while the wild animal won't do that). If *we* are trapped in a sin, or a flaw, or have been trapped by Satan—we may, indeed, feel foolish. Shame and anger may fill us (at being **snares**, as we have been); but we don't need to panic, because *God is there to deliver us upon our repentance*. And that's a fact.

You see—God understands, brethren, the battles that we fight. He understands Satan; and He wants us to be **victors**. Thus, He has made those of us who belong to Him (and who love Him) a promise. You can follow along, if you want, in Psalm 91; but I'll read this from THE LIVING BIBLE.

Psalm 91:1-4 (The Living Bible) We live within the shadow of the Almighty, sheltered by the God who is above all gods. This I declare, that he alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I am trusting him. For he rescues you from every trap and protects you from the fatal plague. He will shield you with his wings! They will shelter you. His faithful promises are your armor.

Then he goes on to say [in verse 7] that a thousand may drop at your side and ten thousand at your right hand; but you'll be spared.

Psalm 91:14-16 (The Living Bible) For the Lord says, "Because he loves me [meaning those who love Him], I will rescue him; I will make him great because he trusts in my name. When he calls on me, I will answer; I will be with him in trouble and rescue him and honor him. I will satisfy him with a full life and give him my salvation."

James backs up what the psalmist said, when he tells us:

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried [proved], he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him.

So, brethren, this is what God has in store for us—even though, for a while, we may be tested and tried.

I couldn't help but think of what Mr. Armstrong said. He wanted to encourage us; and so he said, "I've read the end of the Book, and we win!"