

## How Satan Destroys Faith

### Everyday Temptations

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Please open your Bibles to Hebrews the 10th chapter.

**Hebrews 10:32-38** But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings, partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

My purpose through this entire Feast has been to do what I can to help prepare us for what is surely coming—and even now is, to some extent, upon us—by helping us to make us aware that we are involved in something that is very big, global in scope, encompassing many decades of time, and perhaps we might even say, centuries of time. And we are reaching a critical point in the development of what is happening. It is ominous in its import and has reached out and has been used to give the church a very hard wake up call. Worldliness has infiltrated the church in the form of what we call Laodiceanism and this in turn has produced sin. And so God has scattered us.

Now these occurrences work to cause faith to deteriorate so people are questioning the faith once delivered in virtually every point. The very first year in the existence of the Church of the Great God, I received 40 papers from people who wanted to change things that we had received and which

were responsible for the building of faith within us. In addition to that, people's devotion to their first love to Jesus Christ (Revelation 2) has waned. I mean our love for Him has waned and self-interest is the driving force of many.

The evidence for that is that the church is rife with unrest and confusion, and splitting continues steadily, even if it is more slowly than it was before. I think it could be truthfully said that if our faith had been strong over the past 20 years, these things would not have occurred. Instead, a strong-in-faith church would have been scattered by an external persecution, which seems to me to be far more honorable than the source of the scattering that we are now experiencing.

I think it ought to be of high priority that we cry out to God to increase our faith at this critical time. But brethren, we have got to understand that we are not dealing with magic. Faith does not come from God just because we ask. Romans 10:17 says that, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We have to make the effort to hear it, and then we have to receive it and submit to it. In order to increase our faith, we also have to be on guard against losing what we do have, lest we lose the foundation for building, and lest what has already happened continue to happen, or happen again.

I chose these particular verses out of the book of Hebrews because Hebrews was written to a group of people that were slipping away, and the book shows very clearly that there was a time when they endured great afflictions, great difficulties. But now Paul was not sure that they were ready for what was coming as they reached towards the end of their course.

Now, the end of the race is usually more difficult than the beginning only because of weariness exacting its toll, and the pressure to give up increases, and in some cases becomes almost unbearable.

Perhaps a vivid illustration of this occurred at the conclusion of the women's marathon at the Olympics a few years ago when the news showed, over and over again, that young Swiss woman staggering into the Olympic stadium and around the track before the eyes of tens of thousands of people. But she did not give up and she went as far as she possibly could. Someone even came out of the infield section there to try to help her to make it all the way

to the finish line. But she set a very fine example in what she did, even though it was only a race for a piece of gold or bronze, or whatever it was.

In I Corinthians the 13th chapter is one of the best known verses in all of the Bible.

**I Corinthians 13:13** And now abide [or lives or continues] faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Here are the three most important spiritual virtues. But we must understand that faith is the foundation of the other two. Without faith hope is merely an ephemeral longing, but faith gives vision and solid assurance that a hope can be accomplished. And though love is the supreme virtue of all, faith gives the reason and purpose for love.

Paul said in Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the substance—sub, under; stance, standing. Faith stands under these other things and supplies the support and the reason and the purpose for anything else that has developed in relation to God. And so it is of very, very great importance.

In the book of Luke we will turn to that verse that was used earlier here.

**Luke 18:7-8** "And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The recent circumstances in the church ought to make us be able to relate to this parable and the question of Jesus with more understanding than ever before. Yes, when Christ returns there will be faith, but this parable shows that faith, the kind of faith that God wants, involves an element of persistence, of being able to endure for a lengthy period of time on a course that God has set, and all the while ignoring the persuasions of Satan and this world to turn aside.

So faith is not magic, It requires thoughtful consideration, evaluation of evidence, and the setting of the will in order for it to grow. You cannot be persistent and persevering and enduring without the setting of your will that

is bolstered by the belief that you have as a result of God's Word. Let us not be fooled any longer that even having faith requires no work. Yes, it does. God does His part but we have to do our part as well, or that faith will always stay on a very low level and be quite unproductive.

Let us go back to the book of Lamentations, chapter 3. We are going to read quite a number of verses here, beginning in verse 39.

**Lamentations 3:39** [put yourself into this, put the church into this]  
Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

Do we have a right to complain before God about the condition of the church? Brethren, we are getting what we earned! That is made very clear in other sections of Lamentations. Whatever man sows he reaps, and we are not being scattered because we have been righteous and good. We are being scattered because of sin. We scattered from the inside out.

**Lamentations 3:40-50** Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven. [Not just our hands rising in prayer, but our mind, our very being rising with those prayers and really putting something into them.] We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned.

You have covered Yourself with anger and pursued us; You have slain and not pitied. You have covered yourself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through. [These people were feeling that God had gone way off somewhere and that their voices were just going up bumping against a cloud somewhere and bouncing back down again.]

You have made us an offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction. My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, till the Lord from heaven looks down and sees.

Here in this chapter, the church is portrayed as one person praying to God, and by this time the church has reached a position in its repentance, in its understanding of what is going on, where they are persistently—they are not letting up—crying out to God for rescue from the situation that they find themselves in. And God is testing their seriousness.

I read this because I want you to see that it takes faith to be involved in God's work, because having come out of this world in Satan's image, educated in its ways and attitudes, we do not really know what is good for us in the long run. But God does. We are impatient and so accustomed to quick gratification, that to wait for something is sometimes almost unbearable.

So this section shows the church in the midst of its scattering, but at the beginning of its repentance, but still experiencing God appearing, for all intents and purposes, that He is not hearing its prayers. But be persistent, do not give up, because He is faithful.

This very chapter says, "Great is His faithfulness" and it is because of His faithfulness that we are not consumed. And the church eventually comes to the place where it sees that it is getting *less* than it deserves, so we better not complain. Because in reality we deserve death for what we have done in turning our backs on God. But God does know what is good for us. And knowing what end He has in mind, He has to refuse our requests from time to time. And that really gives our faith a test.

Now, can your faith stand delays until He is able to answer, until the constraints that are in His mind, considering the end towards which He is drawing us have finally been lifted and He has the opportunity because He sees that the conditions are now right to finally intervene and give us what He wants? So can we wait while He delays until He is able to answer? Brethren, we need to pray for the power to live regardless of the environment and the circumstances. Things are rarely done under perfect conditions and we have to play with the hand that is dealt to us.

Just a little insight. This piano here is not all that good. Everybody that plays it has to play with the hand that is dealt to them. And there are difficulties in that. And so the pianist has to struggle to make the music come out as good as he or she possibly can. But it is a little metaphor in the way life is. We are

rarely ever dealt a circumstance that is perfect because it is dealing with difficulty that produces the kind of qualities that God wants to have in us, and brethren, and it takes *faith* to do that! And when a pianist finds himself in a condition like this, he has to cry out to God and trust that God is somehow going to make it come out right, despite the piano.

Now, God does not ask us to convert people but only to be a light, to be a witness, to be a witness by our lives that our God *is* God. And so we have to bear our witness whatever the environment, whatever the circumstance, whatever the cost. Jesus said that we have to bear our cross.

Making things worse is the fact that we do have an arch-enemy and he is working night and day to destroy our confidence in God. And one of the essentials to victory is to know as much as you can about your enemy. In Ephesians the 6th chapter, verse 11, we see an insight as to how he works to destroy our faith, to wear us down, or to catch us off guard. Paul says,

**Ephesians 6:11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

It is that word "wiles" that I want to concentrate on for just a minute or two. It is the Greek *methodeia*, and it means "to work in an organized manner." There are methods to his madness, in other words. However, this word only appears one other time in one other verse, and incidentally it is also in the book of Ephesians and there the word is translated deceit. Not wiles, deceit. Not to work in an organized manner, but deceit.

Thus it is apparent that the word as the apostle used it has evil connotations to it. And in searching Greek literature, these scholars have found that they themselves used it to mean or to indicate craft, cunning, scheme, stratagem, art, trickery. Again, reflecting on the very first thing that the Bible says about Satan in Genesis 3:1, where it says that the serpent is more cunning (or more subtle) than all of the beasts of the field.

Here in this context in Ephesians 6:1, there is nothing to indicate that there is any persecution, either active or threatening, of the Ephesian church. Therefore the "wiles of the devil" has to mean all the manifold temptations to unbelief, to sin, or to conformity to this world. In Hebrews 3, unbelief is

equated with disobedience as being one and the same one, that one is the synonym for the other, even though they do not mean specifically the same thing. Now in that very illustration that I just gave in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are shown disobeying God, because they did not believe Him, thus showing in a very simple illustration that disbelief and disobedience are so closely related that in the mind of God they are one and the same.

Now, a Christian's faith is inched toward destruction by getting him to accept subtle deceptions that lodge themselves into his belief system. And at the very least what that does is cloud our perception of right and wrong thus making right choices more difficult, and at the same time, raising our tolerance level to sin so that it becomes more acceptable.

To give you an illustration. If, 15 years ago, you were this much more righteous than the world and now today you are still this much more righteous than the world, but all the while the world has been going down, you have been going down, even though you are still more righteous than the world. And what pulls us down is making the wrong evaluation, being subtly, cunningly, tricked into believing that if we are just a little bit more righteous than the world, we must be alright. The wrong kind of evaluation that we are cunningly tricked into doing something like that. And so that subtly raises the possibility of sin.

This is important to understand because we make choices on the basis of what we believe. As I said in that other sermon, we do not say, "Well, I don't believe this, therefore, I'm going to do it." We act on the basis of what we believe.

Now, even as God's work, according to John 6:29, is that we should believe in Him whom He has sent, Satan's work is to alter, and if possible, destroy faith through subtle deceptions. (Genesis 3 again) God clearly shows what the work of Satan is. He destroyed Adam and Eve's *faith*, and immediately they sinned! That is why unbelief and disobedience are, in the biblical sense, synonymous.

The first issue that Satan raised with Adam and Eve was that they should perhaps consider God's Word not to be trusted and thus he introduced into their thought that God is a liar who cannot be trusted. That He withheld

information from them, that He is a faithless God. Throughout the Bible, then, God warns us about false prophets, false visions, false apostles, false ministers, and false doctrine. And it is our responsibility to carefully analyze and evaluate the things that people say in order that something that is deceitfully misleading, subtly and deceitfully misleading, does not lodge itself in our value system or in our belief system.

**I Timothy 4:1-2** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times [our time now] some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

These agents of Satan appear as angels of lights, making Satan himself appear as the same. Spotting and rejecting these people is sometimes very difficult, requiring a great deal of time and a great deal of help from God. But be warned, they are not always in religion. They are in science, academia, the healing arts, politics, and the business world as well, because they have impact upon our belief system. And so you can have somebody like Charles Darwin, just to make it very obvious, who writes things that impact upon God's way of life, and those things can become lodged in our minds.

I am going to make this thing about false ministers more pointed. Jesus too warned of false ministers, because they are the ones who are most dangerous to salvation. "Wolves in sheep's clothing," He called them. He also warned us directly to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which He said was false doctrine.

**I John 2:18** Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

Even in their days, there were many of them. Think what they could write about now. A deluge!

**I John 2:19** They went out from us [which means that very many of these people had contact with the true church], but they were not



of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

**I John 2:24** Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.

The message in these general epistles is always the same. In times of trouble, in times of doubts, we have to turn back to what produced the faith in the first place, the faith once delivered, "that which you heard from the beginning." See, the false ones came in, they were among us, and then they went out from us. Not necessarily did they leave the Body, but they certainly went away from us doctrinally. I once heard Dr. Hoeh say in a sermon, "Sometimes you have to leave the church to stay in the church," and he is still there. He did not follow his own advice. You always have to follow the message! Wherever the message is, that is where faith is—saving faith.

**I John 2:24** Therefore let that abide in you which you have heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Do you know when it is that you have the faith of Christ? It is when you believe what Christ believes. It will be identical. So, if that which you have heard from the beginning remains in you, which was the faith that Christ gave to the apostles, you shall also continue in the Son, will still be in union with Him, because we believe the same thing He does. He will not reject His own.

**I John 2:25-26** And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. These things have I written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.

Always there is that element of cunning, of craft, of art, of deception, of lying. It may be very subtle and somewhat beyond our grasp, but we have to fight for it. And if you are beginning to have doubts about somebody or

some teaching, get it off your chest. I do not mean in an angry way. Let us try to explain, let us reason together, let us understand, because we do not want to lose anybody at all to Satan.

Now, in one sense, all the rest of the areas of Satan's attacks are derived from understanding this first principle. That is, that he will be subtle and crafty. He avoids direct confrontation with those who are of the truth, except as a last resort. If nothing else, if all else fails, then he will terrorize, but he would far rather do it subtly because then he can remain in the background. But if he attacks us head-on, he reveals himself and he would rather not go to that extent. He would rather remain out of sight, out of mind, but at the same time pulling the rug out from under us spiritually.

I am going to give you another series of ways by which he subtly deceives.

The first one is by making us think that God is weak. And the reason for that is that weakness cannot be trusted. Do you think that an athletic coach who wants to win a game, puts his weakest team on the field? He puts his strongest team on the field, those that he trusts will be able to carry out his strategy or whatever it is in order to emerge victorious.

Satan wants to undermine God by making Him appear weak. So a wise person does not assign guarding the hen house to the fox. When the West was settled, it was not the Eastern city slicker that was assigned the responsibility of heading the wagon train across the West. They wanted somebody there that could be trusted to pick out the right trails and understood all the difficulties along the way to give guidance.

In most cases, Satan knows that he cannot destroy us by confronting us directly so he generally avoids direct confrontation, but he is *the* great propagandist who knows all about image. Now, do you remember image? That is what advertisers always package their product in so that we associate the product with the image. It is a subtle means of introducing beauty, or whatever it is they are trying to get across, into your mind so that it will be associated with the product. And so you see calendars selling pipe fitting equipment that have beautiful girls all over them. The association, beauty, with a pipe wrench. They do not take pictures of old hobos because that is not what they want to get across to a person's mind.

And so they use image to associate a product with thinking and therefore purchasing. They will use scenery, music to fit the image, attractively dressed, muscular, virile looking men sitting around a campfire in an environment of warm camaraderie smoking Marlboros. I do know at least three of those guys have died from lung cancer.

Satan has packaged God, Jesus Christ, as weak, while he subtly tries to focus on worshipping a woman in many occasions. The latest Pope openly worships Mary. He packages God as being of extremes, weak, distant, harsh, uncaring, rigid.

Now in reference to weak, the male is the symbol of the kind of leadership and strength that Satan is trying to obscure. Now a woman has strengths, but they are in a different realm than a man's. And so most of the Catholic organizations, Protestant organizations constantly have a weak, long-haired, long-robed, petulant-looking Christ as their mind's-eye focus. In addition to that, perhaps the most common image producer of all is the crucifix, which pictures Him as dead. See, as though there was not enough power in God to raise Him from His grave. We know that He is not like that, but we can still associate Him with that image because it surrounds us on every side.

Perhaps worse still, Satan has doctrinally deceived people into believing that this is the only day of salvation. If it is, then any thinking person ought to be able to see that Satan is clearly winning. And that God is weaker—the weaker of the two.

Remember that faith is built upon evidence. And so what has to be done to counter these things is to change the image. There is nothing wrong with the principle of image as long as the image that is being used to strengthen your faith is a true one. God uses image all through the Bible. All Satan has done is counterfeited it.

Now there is kind of an opposite of this. That is the image projected by cathedrals. When we visited in Belgium last year we went to Charlemagne's Cathedral there in Aachen, Germany—a huge building. Those of you who visited the capital up here [Jefferson City, MO] will get a sense of this. If you were able to get on the floor where the senators and representatives

meet, and then way up the top there is that domed part of the room and it makes you feel what? Insignificant and overawed by a projection of great power. In this case, the power of the state. Banks realized this and for years they have built these huge edifices so that when you would come into that bank and you see all of this granite all over the place, it immediately made you think solid, substantial, prosperous, a safe place to put my money. Well, in a cathedral, it is huge, imposing, even intimidating, but it is also cold to an extreme and mysterious.

Perhaps the most important thing that we can do in regards to this is to make sure that we do not always associate Christ with the New Testament. He is the God of the Old Testament as well. He created the earth, He sent the blood, He was the one that created all those earthquakes and earth movements that caused the waters to come up out of the ground. He split the Red Sea, He destroyed Egypt, He raised people from the dead, He killed 180,000 troops of Assyria in one fell swoop, just wiped the breath of their life right out of them. And the New Testament is merely one other portion of His personality.

Remember that Jesus is only a Greek word. His real name is Yeshua or Joshua, and Joshua was a type of Christ. A powerful and effective leader, a warrior who planned battles and wars and dispatched his men and led them into battle. Remember that Satan wants us to perceive Christ at a skewed angle, dead on the cross, dead in His overshadowing mother's arms, as a baby in His over-shadowing mother's arms, as a lamb, but rarely the lion. He is a perfectly balanced personality.

Remember His earthly occupation. His job demanded hard physical labor. He was muscular, vigorous, had calloused hands. He undoubtedly had to dig ditches for foundations, swing mallets, and to handle chisels, to cut stone, and saw planks from logs from trees that He probably also felled.

**Colossians 2:8** Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, . . .

This is one aspect of that that we are talking about here. The vain deceit after the tradition of men, the way men, unconverted men, look at Christ, look at God. We want to get an image out of the Bible that is absolutely correct so that it will undergird the words that our faith is based in.

**Colossians 2:8-9** . . . according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

All of God that could be crammed into a man was in Him. Was God weak, so weak that He could not resurrect Him from the dead? My Bible tells me in Ephesians the first chapter:

**Ephesians 1:19-20** And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.

**Hebrews 1:1-3** God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds [our God is Creator]; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Jesus Christ healed, cast out demons, He walked on water, He calmed the raging storm, He confronted and defeated Satan, He stood up to the authorities of the day, He laid down His life as the good shepherd. God expects you and me to take time to make, to draw an image contrary to what Satan has flooded this world with. That is our responsibility. Then you have to go on from there, knowing full well that you are dealing with a very, the *most* powerful personality that there is.

The second area that he tries to work very hard at deceiving us in, is that God is disinterested or that He has gone way off somewhere. Remember the lament there in Lamentations? It was as if they said, "God, where are you? We are praying and we haven't gotten any response from You. Do you care at all that we, Your children, are having this occur to us, that we are in pain, we are desperate, that we are near death?" Still God kept silent, I am sure, to test faith.

In Matthew the 27th chapter, verse 39, I have had this particular one touch me personally. Because my own father said to me once that he would never bow down to a God who would allow people to suffer as people were suffering on earth. "Yeah, where is God? Is He disinterested or gone way off or He doesn't care?" As a matter of fact, Jesus had this very thing thrown up to Him while He was on the cross.

**Matthew 27:39-43** And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Where is God when you need Him most? This is a very common charge of Satan that appears to have validity because so many who have a good relationship with God have been allowed by Him to suffer, and in some cases, excruciatingly painful deaths. There was Jesus Himself, the apostles, and the prophets being the prime examples. But it happens to us as well because we are part of the same Body that they were and our God is the same God. And that God follows patterns that we have to understand.

**Psalms 13:1-3** How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? [I guess David was waiting for quite a while.] How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul [How long shall I meditate on this?], having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and

hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

So God does sometimes allow our trials to go on seemingly without end. And we wonder, is it ever going to stop? Well, let us look at a few verses in II Peter 3.

**II Peter 3:1-4** Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

**II Peter 3:8** But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

If we allow thoughts like these, that God is disinterested or has gone way off, to continue without also bringing to mind that God is faithful, and that if there be no delays, then there is no need for faith, and it would not be a condition of salvation. In other words, waiting and faith go hand in hand. How much faith does one need when one is answered immediately every time? You do not need much faith, just barely enough to make a request.

So we have to face the twin realities that God is not visible to us and therefore we need faith on that basis. And also that exercising faith, trusting Him, enduring the delays until deliverance, is a condition. And it is the very means by which His purpose will be worked out in our lives. Therefore, it is par for the course. And we should have understood that when we were baptized.

Now, when you take a test at school or on the job for a promotion to be admitted to a certain level, a professional practice, are you not on your own? The instructor is not there giving you or showing you answers or how things ought to be done. If God gave tests the way we would like Him to give tests,

we and He would end up knowing nothing about our capabilities. I guarantee you that little or nothing would be internalized either. In other words, there would be no sanctification. The process would stop. You get my drift? It has to be done this way.

Let us go back to Genesis 22 and the testing of Abraham and the slaying of Isaac.

**Genesis 22:11-12** But the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me."

It has to be done this way so that God will know and so that His way will be internalized within us so that it becomes first nature with us. So be aware of this. Do not let Satan let you think that God has gone far off somewhere. Every test is designed for the level that we are now capable of and we should be able to pass them. He has promised that in I Corinthians 10:13. So do not let Satan make you think God has turned His back or gone way off. He is simply standing at the back of the room while you take the test. So delaying is a part of God's normal pattern.

Right at the beginning in the Garden of Eden that pattern was established. Do you think He was not watching what was going on? He could have intervened at any time and told Eve, "Uh, uh, uh. Don't touch that dial." But He did not, and He showed the pattern.

There is a very interesting verse in regard to Hezekiah and God's testing him, and I cannot remember where it is right now. I believe it is in II Chronicles somewhere. But at any rate, the verse said that God withdrew Himself to see what Hezekiah would do. And if I remember the context, Hezekiah blew it. That was the time he took the Babylonians in to see all the gold and all the treasures and everything, and God must have said, "Oh no." One of His names is Yahweh Shammah, He is "the God Who Is There."

A third area that Satan works at destroying faith is to make us think that God is so merciful virtually anything goes. He mutes God's justice. This one has



been a masterpiece of subtlety, perhaps made even more amazing because right at the beginning of the Book it says, "In the day that you sin, you shall surely die." The wages of sin is death.

Now, how did Satan do it? By doing three things: 1) By taking advantage of human nature's enmity against God, 2) teaching the false doctrine that the law is done away, while at the same time, 3) emphasizing grace to such an extent that responsibility and obligation are lost in a flurry of words.

Let us go back to the book of Jude. We are pretty close to it there in II Peter.

**Jude 3-4** Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

My Bible has a little number three on that word, lasciviousness [KJV]. And in the margin, it says "licentiousness." Both *Strong's* and *Zodhiates* say this word means licentiousness and that word, in turn, means license. Virtually every adult in this room carries a driver's license in your wallet, on your person, in your purse, and a license is a symbol of official approval, giving authority to engage in a specified activity. So what the driver's license does is give us the approval of the state to operate our automobiles on public roads. So the thought here is *official approval*. Now, the word developed into meaning unrestrained liberty of action, deviation from or relaxation of established rules or codes.

These men who crept into the church gave people license, that is, official approval to sin. So here was the church, as it were, saying that it is okay to sin. So doctrinally, one of the first things that has to be done is to do away with the sense of responsibility to a personality—God, Jesus Christ—and Their law. And he pulled it off because of mankind's enmity toward God. That is, human nature is very willing to be unhindered by such restraints.

That is, the restraints of law and the restraint of responsibility to a personality. The Trinity obscures the personality of God by blending them together into something that is too vague for a person to really get ahold of.

So if you think about the principle that is involved here, it makes for ridiculous situations when you think of them in a public area pertaining to practical civil matters. Can you imagine not having to answer to an authority, the state, while you give unrestrained liberty to drive your automobile? Because there is no law that you are responsible to. It would be chaos out there! Well, speaking spiritually, this is what Satan has pulled off in regards to God. It is mind boggling! And here we have relationships with the true church, with God through the true church, and a major portion of that body has said we no longer have to answer to this Personality through obedience to His law. It is almost too amazing to comprehend.

**Ecclesiastes 8:11-13** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Solomon gives a true principle there, whether it be in regards to civil behavior or in our relationship with God. He is basically saying there that the wages of sin is still death since we cannot allow ourselves to be sucked into the world's faith-destroying thinking. If we are going to be like God, who never sins, we have to begin right here and now controlling ourselves to do the same. If the restraints to sin are not self-imposed, what good are we to God? We could never be trusted out of His sight, as it were, in His great creation.

We must be self-governed. That is the term that I have been using, which simply means that we have the law of God internalized. It is part of us and we apply, *we* impose, the restraints from within and not wait for the minister to do it, or not wait for God to come down with the anvil. We impose the

restraints because we believe. So, Satan has taken advantage of God's plan, having different judgments and of leaving man pretty much largely hands off on the normal day to day matters. I am talking about the unconverted here.

A man of faith knows that just because a penalty is delayed, it does not mean that it is not coming. He knows that one of God's patterns is to delay in order to allow a person space to repent so that He does not have to hit us with a two by four, which is actually an act of mercy on His part, for His son.

Let us look at a principle of God's jurisprudence in Hebrews the ninth chapter.

**Hebrews 9:22** And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

If the law is broken, His spiritual law, if it is broken, somebody has to pay! That is an all-encompassing statement. When somebody sins, somebody has to pay, and it will either be the individual or Christ Jesus. One or the other, maybe both. God's mercy is not unending elasticity. It cannot be stretched endlessly in every direction. God is a God of justice and vengeance. Everything is going to be balanced out, primarily through Christ's blood.

Now, think for a moment about how costly human forgiveness is through the court systems. There are very frequently heavy fines and/or imprisonment, sometimes both. But God's is even more costly because ultimately sin requires the life of Jesus Christ. And so God is not soft-headed, He is not so indulgent that He is overlooking things. The law is not a church taboo, it is divine, and God will not budge one inch because the blood of His Son is involved in it. That would be tramping on the blood of His Son if He allowed us to get away with sin.

How can one have faith in the sacrifice of Christ if God is so easy that it virtually eliminates the need for His death? That kind of thinking towards making Christ's sacrifice inconsequential, because after applying it to a person, the person can live practically anyway he wants, because God is easy. Now such thinking is faith destroying, because it produces sin and sin destroys faith.

You can write down Hebrews 10:26-27, 29-31 that has to do with mercy. But understand that mercy comes into play after the penalty has, or is being, paid.

This next point is that faith destroys sin. And, it does not even have to be your sin. I think we all agree that we are living in a very sinful world and every indication is that it is going to get worse. In Matthew 24:12 it says, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

Remember what I said at the very beginning of this sermon: Faith, hope, and love. But faith is the foundation of those other two. And if faith begins to weaken, then the other two begin to deteriorate. But it works the other way too. If sin wanes, faith begins to lose its strength.

**Psalms 73:1-6** Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.

I do not think I need to go any further there. You understand the principle and I think that we understand the story here pretty fully.

Look at what watching the sin and the prosperity of the wicked did to that godly man's faith. It nearly destroyed it, because watching that produced a sin in *him*, envy. Sin destroys faith. And it does not have to be your sin, another person's sin will in turn sow a sin in us. Now again, this is another play on that principle, if God is so powerful, why does He allow such unfairness to exist? Well, let us go to Hebrews the third chapter

**Hebrews 3:12-14** Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unbelief is evil, now why?] in departing from the living God [A person who really believes will not depart, but if we disbelieve, we begin departing. And so he tells people]; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. [the deceitfulness

of sin causes faith to crumble if we allow to deteriorate] For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

**Hebrews 3:17-18** Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?

There it is. He rejected those who sinned, He rejected those who did not believe. They are equated there as being one and the same, part of the same coin, or the same operation.

From this, brethren, we can pick up what it is that separates us from the world. And that is faith in God, called here belief. Adam and Eve did not believe and they laid the foundation for the world, and all of their descendants have continued in their way, by not believing and then carrying on a life on that basis. Now, because sin abounds people are deceived into thinking that it can be gotten away with and so they participate in it with others who are doing the same thing. Sin deceitfully promises joy and fulfillment, other elements of what people may consider to be the good life, but it cannot deliver on a sustained basis, and certainly cannot deliver a person eternally. Sin creates the illusion that one really can get away with it.

Ask yourself this question. Do you have faith in Christ only under certain circumstances? Only when He is doing miracles, feeding the multitude, walking on water, dividing the Red Sea, raising the dead? Do you have faith only when you can see direct evidence of His strength and power? Well, there is even plenty of that around all the time.

What would be your reaction if you were standing there when Jesus said that there was none greater born of women than John the Baptist and then two days later you saw John the Baptist's head on a platter. Would that destroy your faith? Would the sin of Herod destroy your faith in the word of Jesus Christ? What if you saw Jesus Christ proclaim Himself the Son of God, and then witnessed Him being crucified? Would the sin of those who put Him to death cause you to lose your faith in His Word? We could go on and on with that principle.

**Ecclesiastes 8:6-7** Because to every matter there is a time and judgment, though the misery of man increases greatly. For he does not know what will happen; so who can tell him when it will occur?

One of the keys to keeping faith, trusting, persistently enduring is to understand the time element. When is God going to render His judgment? Nobody knows. But we must understand that His apparent weakness is truly only *apparent*. It is temporary. He will follow through when it suits His purpose, not when it suits our feelings.

**Ecclesiastes 11:9** Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

It is just as certain for the young as it is for the old, it is just as certain for any other person on the earth as it is for you: All things work together for good for them who love God and are *the* called according to His purpose. Do not let sin deceive you into losing your faith.

I have one more point here, but I will not go into it. That is that Satan labors to get one thinking that he deserves more and better. Perhaps this is the most important one to us, but time has run out. Satan labors to get one thinking one deserves more and better.

**I Corinthians 4:1-5** Let a man consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not judge myself. [Paul says] For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore [here comes a general principle] judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, . . .

Just hang on to your faith. Do not leap to conclusions because the chances are very great those conclusions might be wrong. God is not weak! God has not disappeared from your life. God still condemns sin. Do not let your love

be washed away. Hang on to your faith and make it a strong foundation for your love.

**I Corinthians 4:5** . . . who will both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Salvation is by grace through faith, and those who want to have faith and to have it strengthened, are going to work to increase that faith so that it is pleasing to God and exemplifies Him in our lives.

Now, let us finish in Ephesians the fourth chapter.

**Ephesians 4:30-32** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

At the base of our salvation is faith, and it is produced in us the evidence that God presents to us. And God wants us to turn that faith into activity, into conduct that is like what He would do were He in our position.

I know that we all want to be united eventually into one body, and I am sure that that is coming. But for right now we have to learn to apply very important lessons so that we can *be one*. And we have got to use the faith that we do have in order that it might occur.

These are simple instructions: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, put bitterness and anger and clamor and evil speaking away from us—with all malice. And be positively kindhearted one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving, even as God in Christ forgave you. Those evil things occur when we lose our faith. It opens the door so that we will not act in the image of God—in love.

So Satan packages God as weak, that He is disinterested or He has gone way off somewhere. That God is so merciful that one can get away with almost anything. Sin destroys faith, and it does not have to be our own. And finally, Satan gets one to think that they deserve more and better.

This is quite a challenge to us, but overcoming these subtle deceptions and putting our focus on God as our Savior, and working to increase our faith—those things that will build a unity will come about.