

The Condition of the Church Today

A Warning About the Enemy Within

The Enemy Within – the devil

April 3, 2011

I. Review:

- A. The title of our current study is “The Condition of the Church Today,” with a focus on the enemy within. My goal in this study is to warn us about the subtlety of false teaching in the church and to encourage us to hold the line of truth.
- B. Last Sunday I gave you two primary principles separating false teaching from the truth of God: (1) False teaching elevates self above God. It makes us the important ones and God the servant whose task it is to please us. (2) The true gospel teaches the superiority of God above all else. It makes us God’s servants who are to live to please Him. We then looked at Jeremiah and Lamentations to gain God’s perspective on the nature of false teaching, the nature of false teachers, and the nature of those who like to hear false teaching.
- C. I concluded last Sunday by saying there are three enemies within the church that we must be guarded against: the devil, the false teachers, and us – the people in the pews who want false teaching enough to hire and support false teachers. Today, we are going to look at the devil’s strategy in promoting and perpetuating false teaching.
- D. Pray
- E. Who is this study for? Not churches and Christians outside our doors, but for us. This is not a study of them to make us feel better or safer or superior. It is a study intended to call to our attention what I have discerned – albeit in small ways – going on among us. And my hope is that we will see the many influences that press in on us, and in seeing, reject the false influences and hold the line for the truth.

II. One Enemy That Lurks Within The Church – the devil

- A. A general overview of the devil’s nature and methods
 1. *He is a murderer and a liar, truth is not in him* – **John 8:44b** . . . He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
 2. *He is a schemer, a spirit(ual) force operating within our world, wicked, and darkness – as opposed to God who is light* – **Ephesians 6:11-12** . . . Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm

against the schemes of the devil. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

3. *He is the Christian's adversary (enemy, opponent, someone who is fighting against us to gain a victory over us), and he like a roaring (hungry) lion who is zealously looking for a meal – I Peter 5:8 . . .* Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
4. *He is an accuser who tempts us to sin, and when we do, he goes to God and tattles on us in an effort to turn God against us – Revelation 12:10 . . .* Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.
5. *He disguises himself as an angel of light, or as a servant of God, and he motivates his human workers within the church (false teachers) to follow his example – II Corinthians 11:13-15 . . .* For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. [15] Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.
6. *He is a deceiver, looking to turn people against God – II Corinthians 11:2-4 . . .* For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. [3] But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. [4] For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.
7. **In Summary:** There is absolutely nothing good in the devil. He is the opposite of God. He is darkness while God is light. He is evil while God is good. He is committed to turning you against God while God is committed to reconciling you to Himself. He is committed to destroying you physically and spiritually. He is a liar, a schemer, a deceiver, and a master of disguise. He is constantly looking for prey to capture and devour. When he does get us to sin, he goes before God

to accuse us, with the expectation that God will punish or destroy us. And finally, he is not only our enemy, he is God's enemy.

B. The temptation of Christ, as recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, gives us a clear picture of the devil's activities within the church today.

1. **Luke 4:1-13** . . . Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness [2] for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. [3] And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." [4] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.' " [5] And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. [6] And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. [7] "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." [8] Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' " [9] And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; [10] for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you to guard you,' [11] and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " [12] And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' " [13] When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

2. There is a common thread through these three temptations that has three parts to it:

a. **First**, each temptation offers an alternate path to all the good things God offers or promises us – such as provision for the needs of our body, material possessions, spiritual blessings, a comforting sense of security, personal happiness, health, and the approval of God. And in all cases, the devil's alternate path is noticeably different from God's path.

(1) When we compare the two paths, it soon becomes clear that the devil's path is different from God's path in two distinct ways:

(a) The devil's path most often brings immediate – or at least much quicker – results, requires no denial of self, is far

less work – thus making it a lot easier, and is cost free – at least for awhile.

- (b) However, though the devil's path is far more enticing and enjoyable in the short term, it always brings some form of loss or destruction, and ends in eternal damnation.
- (2) God's path, on the other hand, always ends in reward, glory, and eternal life with God.
 - (a) However, from the time we pass through the narrow gate of repentance and salvation, and begin walking the narrow way of sanctification, God's path is very costly to our self-life, frequently difficult, usually exhausting due to the required vigilance and warfare against our flesh, the world, and the devil, and abounding with occasions that require some measure of painful self-sacrifice.
 - (b) And yet, for all the hard work, denial of self, and suffering of God's path, those who travel it soon discover **they are filled with** an unshakable joy, a deep inner peace, hard to imagine contentment, mental and emotional rest, life changing spiritual growth, an assuring affirmation that they are children of God, the needed grace and strength to remain faithful to God, a growing intimacy with God, and other blessings that money cannot buy, the world cannot supply, and the devil's path cannot provide.
- (3) However, the devil knows our weakness for the easier way, the less demanding way, the quicker way, the less costly way, the more enjoyable way, and the less painful to self way – and so he presents us with an alternative path to all the good things God offers or promises us.
- b. **Second**, the devil knows our weakness for the immediate – the immediate fulfillment of our needs, the immediate gratification of our flesh, the immediate getting of our way, the immediate release from discouragement or despair, an immediate healing, and whatever other immediate's we think are more important than waiting on the Lord as we persevere in doing things God's way. Therefore, each of the three temptations tempt us:
 - (1) to treat the immediate as more important than the eternal,
 - (2) to treat self-determination as wiser than God's determination as to when the time is right to get what we need or want,

- (3) to treat self-attainment as preferable to waiting on God to provide,
 - (4) and to treat self-gratification as more important than pleasing God.
 - c. **Third**, each temptation implies there is some justifiable reason to act on the temptation. And since we can justify our giving in to the temptation, we can expect God to overlook what we have done.
 - 3. I suspect we all are able to see these tactics of the devil operating within our own lives. However, I am asking us to look at them as more than threats to us personally. These tactics are also a threat to the teaching and practices of the church today. And his intention in using these tactics within the church, is to move the line from truth to falsehood, and from God being supreme to you and I being more important than God.
- C. A look at each temptation to see what we can learn about the specific work of the devil within the church today:
- 1. **Luke 4:3-4** . . . And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." [4] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.' "
 - a. In this temptation the devil is dealing directly with our sense of human need – whether it be genuine need, or felt-need, or desire, or craving, or simply a want based on what others have.
 - b. In presenting the temptation, the devil implies that satisfying our physical needs is both reasonable and right.
 - c. He supports the reasonable and right part by pointing to what we would naturally think God wants for all of those He loves and calls His own. In this way, the devil gives us a basis for justifying the pursuit of self-gratification without regard to God's intentions for the circumstances we are in.
 - d. And so we see that the devil's false gospel elevates the satisfying of human need:
 - (1) over God's will and intentions for us in the situation,
 - (2) over patience in waiting on God to meet our need,
 - (3) and over the grace and strength given to us by God to endure the unfulfilled need until God meets it.
 - 2. **Luke 4:5-8** . . . And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. [6] And the devil said to Him, "I

will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. [7] "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." [8] Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'

- a. In this temptation, the devil is telling us that we can gain the promised blessings of God, and the rewards of doing the will of God without fulfilling two of God's requirements: (1) submitting to God – as God wills us to submit, and (2) without obeying God – as God wills us to obey. In fact, the devil wants us to believe that we can take a path to God's promised blessings and rewards that is not only different from God's path, but it also includes partnering with God's enemy – the devil.
 - b. Here are four examples of what the devil's false gospel tells us:
 - (1) We can love the world in a way that pleases us, and at the same time, love God in the way that pleases Him (**I John 2:15-17** . . . if anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in Him).
 - (2) We can intentionally mingle light and darkness, or good and evil (**Acts 26:18** . . . (Paul before King Agrippa) to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me).
 - (3) We can worship and serve the enemy of God (devil) while at the same time worshiping and serving God (**Matthew 6:24** . . . No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth).
 - (4) And we can obtain God's promised, future blessings without having to endure the personal costs, the personal sacrifices, and the personal suffering commonly associated with denying self and serving God (**II Timothy 2:3** . . . Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus; **II Timothy 3:12** . . . Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted).
3. [9] And he (the devil) led Him (Jesus) to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; [10] for it is written, 'He will

command His angels concerning you to guard you,' [11] and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " [12] And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

- a. In this temptation, the devil is inferring we can act foolishly (i.e., break the laws of nature), or selfishly (i.e., do something spectacular to gain notoriety), with the expectation that God will cover our foolishness or selfishness by rescuing us from the destructive consequences of our behavior.
- b. The implication – or lie – that the devil wants us to believe, is that we can sow to the flesh and fully expect that God will protect us from reaping according to our sowing (**Galatians 6:7-8 . . .** Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life).
- c. It is my experience that there are many in the church today who fully expect God to protect us, or somehow free us from reaping according to what we have sown. And though I have never heard this falsehood clearly taught from the front, it is implied through the exaggerated emphasis on God's love and grace and de-emphasis of God's holiness, discipline, and judgment.

III. Conclusion

- A. The devil does not announce himself or wear a name tag. Rather, he comes as a servant of God, a saint among Christians, a messenger of truth, and as one who speaks the Word of God. And yet, his gospel is false, his promises are lies, his path is broad, his ways are devious, and his goal is to take us with him into the eternal fires of hell.
- B. Therefore, when God warns us about the wiles of the devil, He is not warning us about something that can have only a minor effect on us. He is warning us against the poison of ungodly thinking, the deception of false speaking, the denial of the truth, and a path that only leads to destruction, great loss, and death.
- C. **II Peter 3:17-18 . . .** You therefore, beloved, [having heard this today] (~~knowing this beforehand~~), be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, [18] but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.