

This Is Your Life, Part 3

Ephesians 2:1-10

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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn once again to Ephesians 2 as we continue our study of this wonderful paragraph at the beginning of chapter 2. If you have been a Christian any time at all, or have even read much in the culture, you understand and know of a man named C.S. Lewis. During the Second World War, C.S. Lewis wrote a number of things, but one of the things that he wrote was a series of letters that appeared in a Christian magazine. The letters were supposedly written by a spirit being named Screwtape. Screwtape is presented in these letters as an older wiser demon. He is the uncle of a young demon, an apprentice named Wormwood. So Screwtape writes to Wormwood, giving him advice on how better to accomplish his diabolical mission of destroying one particular young man.

By the way, if you haven't read the book, there's an interesting story even in the preface. C.S. Lewis tells that when these letters were published in that Christian magazine, just as they appear in the book. If you read it, you understand it's satire. And when the letters were published, there was one particular man in the magazine's readership who wrote the magazine asking that his subscription be cancelled. And he said that much of the advice that was given in these letters seemed to him not only erroneous, but "positively diabolical!"

The articles that Lewis wrote were later combined into the book that we know as *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis's purpose in writing them was to show us in a sort of a backhanded way the activity of Satan and demons, what that activity really is.

In the final part of the book, in a section entitled, "Screwtape Proposes A Toast," Lewis presents a very interesting scene. The scene is in hell, at the annual dinner of the tempters training college. And Screwtape is asked to propose a toast as the older wiser of the demons there. The wine, Lewis tells us, with which the toast will be proposed, is "old vintage *Pharisee*." Screwtape says this:

You know how this wine is blended? Different types of Pharisee have been harvested, trodden, fermented together to produce its subtle flavor. Types that were most antagonistic to one another on earth. Some were all

rules and relics and rosaries; others were all drab clothes, long faces, and petty traditional abstinences from wine or cards or the theater. Both had in common their self-righteousness and the almost infinite distance between their actual outlook and anything that the Enemy really is or commands. [Of course, the enemy in this case is God.] All said and done, my friends, [Screwtape finishes] it will be an ill day for us if what most humans mean by 'religion' ever vanishes from the earth. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar.

Those are really profoundly insightful words. Lewis's point is that religion in all its forms is inspired by and used by the devil like no other weapon in his arsenal. That's exactly what Paul wants us to see today, as we return to Ephesians 2.

The first ten verses constitute the first sentence, the first paragraph, and as I've told you before, these really describe the spiritual biography of every Christian. If we wanted to reduce the message of these ten verses to a single point, it would be this. Salvation, that is, spiritual rescue from sin, is entirely the work of God, from beginning to end. As Paul develops that theme, he lays out this dramatic change that has occurred in the life of his readers, in all the lives of his readers. Those who were in the church in Ephesus. He begins in the first three verses by explaining and reminding them of what we were. What we were in the past before salvation, before God found us. The next three verses, verses 4-6 describe what God did, and verses 7-10, why God did it. We've been studying over the last couple of weeks what we were. Just those first three verses. They provide the backdrop for the dramatic rescue that God accomplishes in verses 4-6. We have to understand what we used to be before Christ. Now Paul's explanation of the way we were before Christ includes a number of things that we're working our way through. First of all, our true condition, or nature before Christ. Notice how verse 1 begins, "And you were dead." Paul is describing what theologians call total depravity. Before Christ, we were all completely dead in reference to God. We were cut off from God. As he puts it later in Ephesians, we were without God in the world. Cut off from the life of God and without hope. We were dead spiritually.

Why? Well, he gives us the root cause of our condition. If dead is the condition, the root cause of that condition is at the end of verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." You were dead *by reason of* your trespasses and sins. We were born *spiritually* dead because of Adam's sin. That's found elsewhere in the New Testament. But we are also spiritually dead because of our own individual sins and trespasses and together, those constitute the root cause of our condition, which is dead.

We began last week to look at the practical results of our condition. Verse 2 begins, “in which [that is, in your trespasses and sins] you formerly walked.” Verse 2 says we formerly walked in trespasses and sins. Walk, of course, is a biblical metaphor for behavior, for conduct, for lifestyle, for patterns of living. The dominating quality of our conduct, our behavior, our lifestyle before Christ is that of a constant repetition of individual sins. That’s how we lived.

Paul adds in verse 2, we walked “according to.” It’s a very interesting expression as we saw last time. It means “in conformity to, or in step with.” Our sinful lifestyle was in complete conformity or in perfect lockstep with three powerful forces. Forces that controlled our thinking, that directed our decisions, and that dominated our lifestyles. What were these three powerful forces that we were in lockstep with? Well, he tells us in verse 2, the world. Also in verse 2, the devil, the prince of the power of the air. And thirdly, in verse 3, the flesh. The world, the devil, and the flesh. We were in lockstep with these three powerful forces. We walked, or lived, according to them. Last time we looked at the world. In verse 2, he says we walked according to the course of this world. We conducted our lifestyle in lockstep with the mindset and values of the times in which we lived. The world, as it’s described. That system that Satan has set up that is characterized as opposed to God, with all kinds of mixed up values and priorities and thinking. We were in lockstep with it. We thought we were on our own, we thought we were free. We all tend to think that we make our own decisions. I’m my own person. I decide what I’ll be and do. God says, “No, you weren’t. Before I found you, you were dominated by the mindset of your times.”

Today, I want to examine the second powerful force that directed and controlled our lifestyle before Christ. Not only the world, but also the devil. Verse 2, notice, says that we walked “according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” Now I know the moment I say the word ‘devil’ or say the word ‘Satan’ or, or refer to ‘demons,’ immediately there are four dangers that we all must avoid. Danger number one is thinking that by ‘devil’ and ‘demons’ the Bible means what most people think of when they think of devil and demons. There’s a lot of free-floating ideas about who these beings are, and you see them portrayed in pop culture. You hear about them in songs. Like “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” an old one, I know, but nevertheless. I’m dating myself. Or in movies--horror movies. You know, you see the demonic pictured and so you get this image in your mind of what that’s like. Or even caricatured in almost comic book fashion as a, as a figure in a red suit with a tail. The result of all of this is that the average person, and I would say even to some extent the average Christian’s perception of what these beings are like has far more to do with a comic book than it does with the Bible. So don’t think the Bible means what the culture portrays.

Second danger. Seeing Satan and demons behind every trouble and sin that you encounter. There are Christians who, frankly, think the devil has something to do with a bad hair day. This trivializes these desperately evil beings in a way that the Bible never intended.

A third danger, when we think about Satan and the demons, is thinking that they operate outside of God's control. Thinking somehow that Satan is almost of equal force and being of God. Some people have almost a dualistic picture of Christianity. Listen, we don't believe in a dualism. That there are these two almost equally powerful beings battling for the universe. No, the picture the Bible portrays is the one Luther describes, where the devil is God's devil. He has him on a leash, and only lets him go as far as He decides. Satan is a created being, created by God. His power cannot rival the God of the universe. God, when He chooses, will have him bound. And when He chooses, with a word of His mouth will bind him forever in eternal hell. He only uses him to accomplish His purposes.

The fourth danger, and this is one that's becoming more and more problem in Christian churches, is simply denying their reality. "Well, you know, I can take a lot of the Bible, but do you really believe there's a personal being called the devil? Isn't it just a force? Are you really believing that there are these angelic beings that are now demons and do you really think that's true?" Well, you're faced with a decision. Are you going to believe yourself and your own mind? Are you going to believe the culture or are you going to believe God's revelation? Because the Bible clearly teaches that there is a spirit being of immense power, of incredible intelligence, and of unthinkable evil. And this being has set himself against God. And through deceit and cunning, he led a revolt of a third of the angels that God created, and they now follow his leadership and execute his commands. When did all of this happen? Well, we can't be certain, but probably after Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, because at the end of the sixth day what does God say? "And everything was very good." But before Genesis 3 and the fall of man, because there Satan appears to tempt Adam and Eve to sin. Somewhere in that time frame Satan and the demons fell.

You say, how does that happen? Well, we have a description of it. I want you to turn back to an Old Testament book, back to the book of Ezekiel. Back to Ezekiel 28. Here, I think we have the clearest description of what happened. It's important you understand who this person is that Paul is talking about. He would have understood this intuitively. He would have studied this at length, and he's bringing that to bear, so we need to get up to speed. Ezekiel 28. Here we get insight into exactly how Satan fell. In the first ten verses of this chapter, the prophet describes God's judgment on a human figure. A human

king, the king of Tyre, as he's called, or as we would know it, Phoenicia. The king of Phoenicia. But in verses 11-19 of this same chapter, the prophet seems to go beyond a human figure, beyond the human king of Phoenicia to describe his antitype, Satan himself. The one who, as it were, stands behind this evil human king, and empowers him and prompts his actions. There are things in verses 11-19 that are impossible to attribute to a human being. So I believe you have here, a description not of the king of Tyre, the human king over Phoenicia, but rather the spirit being that empowers him, Satan himself. Look at verse 11.

Again the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, and the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you, On the day that you were created They were prepared. [You have here a description of Satan in unparalleled beauty. If you try even with a cursory read to picture it, you get the picture of this majestic being. And notice his place in heaven. Verse 14.] You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there, And you were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.'"

At some point if we have time to study this passage in great detail, you see that what you have here is a description of Satan's position. He stood in the highest position in heaven. He served at the very throne of God--probably as the chief guardian of the majesty and holiness of God. He was a being of moral spotlessness and perfection. Look at verse 15. "You were blameless in your ways." Donald Grey Barnhouse, the pastor of Tenth Street Presbyterian in Philadelphia before James Montgomery Boice writes this, "Satan awoke in the first moment of his existence in the full-orbed beauty and power of his exalted position, surrounded by all the magnificence which God gave him. He saw himself as above all the hosts in power, in wisdom, and in beauty. Only at the throne of God itself did he see more than he himself possessed. Before his fall, he may be said to have occupied the role of Prime Minister for God, possibly ruling over the universe, but certainly over this world. No created being was higher in position and status and beauty and power than Satan."

So how did he become what he is today? Well, I think verse 15 is the only verse in the Bible that precisely states the origin of sin. Verse 15, "You were blameless in your ways, From the day you were created [until] unrighteousness was found in you." Inside of you.

You see, the origin of sin was in the heart of Satan himself. This incredibly powerful, beautiful, amazing being--the prime minister of heaven. Barnhouse writes, "Sin began with spontaneous generation in the heart of this being in whom such magnificence of power and beauty had been combined, and to whom such authority and privilege had been given." What was his sin? Well, again if we had time we'd look at verses 16 and 17. To summarize it we could say that his sin was pride, personal ambition, and self-promotion. You see, he decided that he wanted to rule. And as John Milton said in his classic poem *Paradise Lost*, Satan decided "better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven." After his fall, Satan has existed for one great purpose, and that is to undermine the eternal plan of God. Now, with that background, turn back to Ephesians 2.

Because here, we meet this powerful spiritual being, and how he intersects with every human life, without exception. According to God himself, I'm not making this up, this is what God says, before a person becomes a Christian, he lives his life not only in lockstep with the thinking of his age, but also in step with, or influenced by the devil himself. Notice what verse 2 says, "we walked according to the prince." Now, clearly the reference here is to the devil. Ephesians has more to say about this being and his forces than any other New Testament letter, and we'll see it as we go through it. We've already encountered one such reference, 1:21 speaks of the various levels of demonic authority in the evil hierarchy of Satan's kingdom. But the rest of the book focuses on the ultimate authority behind all evil. In 4:27, he's called the devil. In 6: 11, the devil. In 6: 16, the evil one. And here in 2:3, the prince. Now the Greek word for prince is used in classical Greek of a ruler, of a king, of a lord. Satan is called a ruler or a lord or a king because he rules over a hierarchy of other supernatural evil beings. In fact, our Lord Himself, on several occasions in the gospels called him the prince of demons. He's the ruler of demons. Satan is the personal center of the power of evil.

Notice how he's described here in Ephesians 2. First, Paul says he is the prince of the power of the air. This describes the sphere or location of his realm. The word that's translated 'power' in that phrase literally means "authority," and it's often translated that way in the New Testament. It can describe the authority itself, and then it's translated as "power or government." It can also describe the sphere of that authority. Then it's translated as "domain or realm or kingdom." And that's probably what Paul has in mind here. Satan is the prince of a "particular domain or realm or kingdom." And Paul describes it. He says the devil is ruler over the domain or realm of the air.

What does that mean? Well, you have to sort of rewind back to the first century, because in the ancient world, the air was the territory between earth and heaven. It's the atmosphere. It's what we breathe into. It's what we walk around in. They believed that it was crowded with spirit beings. Pythagoras, whose name you'll recognize from studies

famous for other things said, “The whole air is full of spirits.” So in Paul’s day, the air all around us was considered to be the dwelling place of evil spirits as opposed to some huge distance away, or as opposed to inside the earth itself, rather the atmosphere in which we walk and live and have our being, these spirit beings were considered to have as well.

Is that a biblical concept? Absolutely. You go back to Job 1:7. You remember that Job and Satan have this interchange. Satan shows up in God’s presence and God says to him, “From where do you come?” And Satan answered to the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” He says, “I’m on earth. The focus of my attention is earth, and the people of earth.” In Ephesians 6:12, you remember Paul says for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness. This is sort of different descriptions of the hierarchy of evil we’ll get to. Where do they exist? In the heavenly places. In the heavenlies. In the realm of the air. Scripture teaches that these powerful beings inhabit the very atmosphere in which we live, or as Ephesians 6 describes it, the heavenly places. A spiritual world in conjunction with our own.

Notice the second description of Satan in Ephesians 2. Not only is he the prince of the power of the air, but he is the prince of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. That describes not where he rules, but how he rules. Now at first glance it’s easy to think of that phrase ‘of the spirit’ as just another name for Satan. He’s the prince of the power, and he’s the spirit now working. But that’s not likely to be true. Based on the Greek grammar here, it’s much more likely, and the New American Standard captures it, that the word ‘prince’ governs both of these expressions. So that Satan is both “the prince over the realm of the air,” and he is “the prince over the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” As Harold Hoehner puts it in his commentaries, “Satan rules over a spiritual disposition.” Or we could say a spiritual atmosphere. The spiritual atmosphere of the world, or the spiritual climate of the world. And that spiritual atmosphere, notice, “is now at work.” Don’t miss the contrast here. We walked formerly according to Satan’s influence, but the rest of the world now is in step with him. And this spiritual atmosphere is incredibly powerful and pervasive. You see the word ‘working?’ That is a Greek word from which we get our English word “energy.” This spiritual atmosphere is powerful and compelling in its influence on the lives of people. On which people? The sons of disobedience. That’s a Hebrewism. It’s a way of expressing the fact that unbelievers are the children of disobedience. They are the children of rebellion. They bear all the qualities and characteristics of disobedience and rebellion.

What Paul intends here is clear. He’s talking about unbelievers. Let me sort of put the whole package together for you. The devil controls or rules the spiritual atmosphere currently at work, energizing those who are in a state of rebellion against God. Now, this

is profoundly helpful in understanding the world in which we live because it underscores for us Satan's primary work. Most people are terribly confused about this. When most people think of Satan, they have been more influenced by the 1970s comedian Flip Wilson than by the Bible. Those of you who've been alive that long remember that he used to say, when he would do something wrong, when he'd commit some sin on his part, he would say, "The devil made me do it." Well, the problem with that is it misleads people about Satan's true strategy. It is true that Satan has put a world system into place that appeals to the lust of the flesh, John says, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Yes, there is a world system Satan has put in place that appeals to those things. And we don't want to discount that. That is a reality. But Satan's major campaign, listen carefully, is not to get people to give in to their flesh. He doesn't have to. What does James say? Every man is tempted and drawn away and enticed what? "By his own cravings." By his own evil heart. Satan doesn't have to do that. You'll do that. I'll do that. On our own. We'll do it on our own. So what is Satan's primary objective then, if it's not to get us to pursue the flesh?

I think Paul puts it very clearly in 2 Corinthians 4:4. "The god of this world [that's Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Satan's task in the world is not fleshly primarily. It is spiritual, primarily. How does Satan do this? How does he blind people to the truth of the gospel? How does he set them on a different spiritual path? Well, I'm convinced that the Bible teaches he has five primary strategies. Let me just give them to you quickly. These are key to understand. He has five primary spiritual strategies that he uses in the world to blind people to the truth.

Strategy number one. He promotes human philosophy and ideology. Look at 1 Corinthians 2. Paul is talking about the revelation he's received from God of the truth in the Bible, that's now inscripturated in the Bible. He says in 1 Corinthians 2:6, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, [the wisdom we speak is] not of this age nor of the rulers of this age [It's not worldly wisdom] but we speak God's wisdom." He's contrasting, you see, these two kinds of wisdom. There's the wisdom of God that's revealed here, and then there's the wisdom of the world. Look down at verse, verse 12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world." Here's, he uses a very similar expression--we have not received the spirit of the world. He's not talking here about Satan. He's talking about that spiritual insight, that wisdom of the world, but we instead have received "the Spirit [capital S, the Holy Spirit] who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God," and we are not into, verse 13, "human wisdom." You see the contrast all through this passage. There's God's wisdom, and there's human wisdom. Human wisdom constitutes all that stands opposed

to God. There's human philosophy and ideologies. They're hinted at here, but I think Paul puts it much more clearly and directly in 2 Corinthians 10.

Turn there. 2 Corinthians 10. In verse 3, he says "we walk in the flesh," that is, we're human beings. We live as human beings, but we don't war according to the flesh. We don't fight with fleshly weapons, with human weapons. Verse 4 for the weapons of our warfare, who's our war with? Ephesians 6, we don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against what? Spiritual powers, spiritual beings. And the weapons of our warfare against those beings are not fleshly weapons, but instead, they are divinely powerful. He's talking here, by the way, about the Scripture. He's talking about the revelation of God. And what do we do with these weapons we have, these truths contained in the word of God? They *destroy* fortresses. The word 'fortresses' is a very interesting word. It's a word that has the idea of fortifications, used of prisons, also used of forts in the sense that we think of them. What are these fortresses? What are these forts? Look at the next verse. *Destroying* speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. The word 'speculations' is the word *logismos* in the Greek text. It means "ideologies, philosophies." He says, listen. Man, this is the picture he's presenting here, man is incarcerated. He's held captive in prisons, in fortresses of wrong thinking, of philosophies and ideologies, and we need to storm those fortresses and destroy them with the revelation of God. This is Satan's tactic. Look around at the world. It is dominated by human philosophy. Evolutionary naturalism, post-modernism, anti-supernaturalism, feminism, radical environmentalism, humanism, materialism, and all the other "-isms." All anti-biblical ideologies are spawned and promoted by Satan himself to keep people's minds in prison and blinded to the truth.

Second strategy. Not only does he promote human philosophy, number two, he promotes false religion. Satan's greatest strategy to oppose the work of God in the world is to promote damning false religion. The Old Testament of course, is permeated by the worship of idols and false gods. And behind each of those idols is a demon, impersonating that god in order to enslave the people. This is exactly what Moses taught them. Turn back to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 32. In the song of Moses, as he lays out his song, he describes the sin of people Israel, and he says in verse 16 that Israel made God jealous with strange gods. They worshiped idols. They worshipped the gods of the peoples. With abominations, they provoked Him to anger. But notice what was really happening behind the scenes.

They sacrificed to demons who were not God,
To gods whom they have not known,
New gods who came lately,
Whom you fathers did not dread.
You neglected the Rock who begot you
And forgot the God who gave you birth.

You see what Moses is saying? He's saying that those false gods of the nations, they don't exist. But behind them, propping them up, as it were, are demons, enslaving people in this false worship so they will not see, they will not respond to the true God. This is the message of the Old Testament. If we had time, I'd take you to Psalm 106:35 and following where the same point is made.

But let me take you to the New Testament. Look at 1 Corinthians 10. Paul makes this very same point during the New Testament era. 1 Corinthians 10:14. He says, "[Therefore, my] beloved, flee from idolatry." He's talking about the nature of idolatry and what it does to you. Verse 18, "Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?" In other words, when they worship false gods, they were in fellowship with these beings. Verse 19, "What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; but I do not want you to become sharers in demons." Paul takes Moses' concept and he says, "Listen, wherever there is false religion, there is behind that religion the presence of evil in the presence of personal spiritual beings who impersonate that god and keep those people in slavery to that false system." I'm not saying they worship demons, nor was Paul saying they worship demons knowingly. They do it unwittingly. They think they are worshiping the God they say they're worshiping. But behind that being that doesn't exist, is a demon. When Satan has full sway over the world in the future, what does he do? He sets up a false religious system under the Antichrist and the False Prophet.

Look at 2 Thessalonians 2. This is what Satan does. He is about false religion, and during the tribulation period, 2 Thessalonians 2 says, that the man of lawlessness, verse 3, the man of lawlessness will "oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." And where does this come from? Where does this human being named Antichrist, or here called the man of lawlessness, where does he get the energy to do all of that? Look down at verse 9, "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan." This is what Satan has been about, is about, and will be about. He promotes false religions of every kind, from moralism to pagan idolatry. From the millions of gods of Hinduism to the environmentalist worship of Mother Earth. Apart from the true worship of the God revealed in scripture, there is no religion that is not energized by Satan and his demons. That's what the Scriptures teach. According to the New Testament, those who look like they are pursuing God, those who are pursuing man-made religion, listen carefully, they are not looking for God. They are not pursuing God. How do I know that? Paul couldn't make it any clearer in Romans 3. There is no one, categorically no one who seeks for God. You say, well, what are they doing then? They're deserting the God who has revealed Himself in creation and the God who has revealed Himself in their consciences,

and they are fleeing that God to a god who will give them permission to do what they want. Religion is a desertion of the true God, and it is all prompted by and scripted by and empowered by demons.

Third strategy. Satan corrupts the true gospel and distorts the true Christ. He corrupts the true gospel and distorts the true Christ. You see, Satan is not just into paganism and idolatry. He's also involved in distorting and perverting the worship associated with the true God. 2 Corinthians 11:4 says that the devil--Satan--transforms himself into an angel of light, in other words, into a messenger of truth. If Satan showed up here this morning, he wouldn't look diabolical. He would look like a wonderful religious teacher. Throughout the Bible we see Satan actively seeking to corrupt the true worship of God. How does he do that? Through false teachers and false prophets. You find them endlessly in the Old Testament. They connect themselves to the true worship of God but they take people off away from it. This mission of Satan only intensifies when it comes to the New Testament. Let me show you a couple of passages. Turn to 2 Corinthians 11. 2 Corinthians 11:12. Here you get a picture of what this looks like in a real church, the church in Corinth. It was a real church in a real place, just like our church. But notice what was happening in the true church, among the true people of God, in Corinth. Verse 12, Paul says,

But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are. [In other words, there are people in Corinth who are claiming to have equal authority, apostolic authority, to me, Paul says, and to the other apostles. And I'm going to cut off their opportunity to do that. Verse 13, here's why.] For such men [Now remember, these were people connected to the church in Corinth, connected to the true worship of God, for such men] are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Don't miss what Paul is saying here. This will change your view of some who teach error, serious damning error in the church. They connect themselves to the church. They call themselves Christians. In this case, they called themselves apostles. And yet Paul says they are not true apostles. They are messengers, or servants, of Satan. Satan is about perverting and destroying the true faith of Christianity, and so he will bring his false teachers up in the church to look like they're the real thing. They'll try to connect with the church, pretend to be, when in fact they are not. This ranges from television preachers to cults.

This past Sunday I had a lengthy conversation with two Mormons. Young men who are trapped in the system of Mormonism. This is really a difficult thing because my heart went out to them. They told me, and this has become the common approach that Mormons have today, "We worship the same Jesus Christ." That's what they said. We worship the same Christ. Here again, is error trying to come into the church and look like they're the real thing. But under prompting and questioning, they had to admit ultimately, that they believe in three separate gods, not one God in Trinity. They believe God the Father has a body. They believe that Jesus Christ is the physically born son of a physical union between God the Father and a woman. They believe that what God is, we can become, and that what we are, God once was. I had to say, tragically to those young men, "Listen, no we have a different God. We have a different Jesus, and we have a different gospel." But you see what Satan does as he tries to get as close as he can to the real thing to try to persuade you that we're all just worshiping the same Jesus. But it's a perversion.

Number four. He prevents the spread of the gospel. In Matthew 13, you remember the parable of the soils? There's seed, the gospel, sown on one heart that's hard. And that hard heart, the seed falls on it, and Jesus says this. The evil one, speaking of Satan, snatches the word away, snatches the seed away. Satan is about preventing the spread of the gospel, whether it's to an individual heart, or whether it's larger. Satan obstructs world missions. Paul said to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, "We wanted to come to you, I, Paul, more than once, and yet, Satan hindered us." Satan also is behind the persecution of Christians to try to limit the spread of the gospel. In Revelation 2, John writes to the church in Smyrna, Jesus Christ says through John, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison." He does everything he can to squash the gospel, and it's spread. Listen to me carefully. If Satan can't get you to buy into human philosophy, if he can't get you to go after false religions of various kinds, if he can't get you sidetracked into some cult or some other perversion of the true faith, and if he can't keep you from hearing the true gospel, it spreads to you, he still has one powerful strategy left.

Number five. He produces false believers in the true church. He produces false believers in the true church. And I'm afraid our churches are filled with such people who walked an aisle at some point, signed a card, prayed a prayer, but their lives manifest no evidence of being disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave a parable. Turn to Matthew 13. He gives the parable of the wheat and the tares--you remember. The wheat, and the tares, a plant that looks very similar until it comes to full head. And they all get mixed in together. The wheat is useful, the tares are worthless. After he gives the parable, verse 36, when he left the crowds and went into the house, the disciples came to him and said, explain to us the

parable of the tares of the field. And he said, the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. I sow the good seed. The field is the world, and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom. In other words, in this case, the seed is not the truth of the gospel, the seed is these who are true believers in Christ. And he plants them all over the world. But the tares, verse 38 are the sons of the evil one. They are unbelievers, and they are mixed in with the true, growing up together, both looking the same for awhile. Verse 39, “and the enemy who sowed those tares is the devil.” You know what Jesus is saying? Here is Satan’s strategy. If he can’t keep you from hearing the gospel, if he can’t get you into a false religion, if he can’t get you into some perversion of the true faith, he’ll let you sit in a church where the true faith is taught, and think you’re a believer, live in self-deception. Matthew 7:21 says, “Many will say to me, Jesus says, many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, look at all we’ve done. And I’ll say to them, depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of lawlessness.”

Those are the primary ways Satan keeps people spiritually blind. Now go back to Ephesians 2 and we’ll be done. Ephesians 2. The context is this. Paul says, when we were spiritually dead, before we came to know Christ, we walked, or lived in step with, in conformity to Satan himself, and particularly we were in step with that spiritual atmosphere that is now powerfully working in the lives of unbelievers. Our lives were dominated either by false religion or by a perverted version of the true faith. For some of us, we never heard the gospel at all. Or perhaps you are like many, like I was, who grew up understanding the true faith, but we lived in utter self-deception, thinking that we belonged to Christ when we didn’t. Whatever your situation was, you were in step with Satan in one of those ways. Then God did an amazing thing. He stepped into our blindness and He gave us light. He stepped into our spiritual death and He gave us life. Colossians 1 says, “He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son.” How did He do that? Look at Ephesians 2:4, “but God.” Those are the two most wonderful words in the English language. Look at what we were, “but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.” How did He do it? By grace, verse 5 says, and verses 8 and 9 say through faith. By believing in Christ and Him alone. Listen, if you’re here this morning and you’re not sure that you’re in Christ, all you have to do, very simply, is accept the grace offered to you in Christ. Turn from what you know to be sin, and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and He will take you from spiritual blindness to spiritual light. He will take you from spiritual death into spiritual life. That’s the promise of a gracious God. Let’s pray together.

Father, when we look at what we were, when we look at how utterly enslaved we were to the spiritual atmosphere that Satan had constructed in this world, we can only give You

thanks. Father, we would never have seen unless You had said, "Let there be light." We would never have come alive unless You had raised us. Father, we thank You and praise You. Help us to see what You have done, that our rescue was absolutely, entirely of You from beginning to end. And may we give you praise, may we worship You, may we love You and serve You and live our lives in manifest obedience simply as a way to say thank You. Father, I pray this morning for those who may be here, who undoubtedly are here, who are still enslaved to the spiritual atmosphere that Satan has enslaved the world in. Lord, may this be the day when they see, may this be the day when they live. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.