

## **“Three Schemes of the Devil”**

Ephesians 6:10–13

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### **Ephesians 6:10–13 (PowerPoint)**

#### **Preface**

Up until last week, from this same biblical passage, we have been considering that the greatest scheme of the devil is “to make people think that the enemy for human beings is people,” and that “our enemy is not people, but the devil.”

This morning, continuing from that, I would like to think about the three schemes of the devil.

#### **Part One**

First, the first one.

The Bible teaches us that the most representative method by which the devil hinders Christians who believe in the one true God—and not only Christians, but also those who have not yet believed in God, preventing them from believing in Jesus Christ and, as children of God, trying to live as God’s children—is “to attack the thoughts of people.”

Let us look at 2 Corinthians.

### **2 Corinthians 4:1–4 (PowerPoint)**

What does it say he darkens?

It says that he darkens the “minds” of those who are perishing—that is, those who have not yet believed in God.

This word “mind,” when considered from its linguistic meaning, becomes “intellect.”

It says that the devil is darkening and attacking our human intellect, with which we would probably boast that “we have built such a marvelous civilized society.”

Ephesians chapter 2 expresses this in the following way.

## Ephesians 2:1–3 (PowerPoint)

Regarding in what sort of “mind” and in what sort of “current” all human beings are born, it says that at birth we are already “dead in sin,” and that we are born in a condition thoroughly soaked in the influence of the false god who has authority over the air—the god of this world, the devil, evil spirits—who seeks to make us do whatever the flesh and the mind desire.

And it says that this very “current” is disobedience toward God, and unbelief toward God.

What we have confirmed over the last three weeks is that it is not we ourselves who determine us, but that there is a third force—not us—which truly exists, namely the devil.

Even Christians who believe in Christ used to belong to this demonic force, but now we have become those who have come to know that we have been rescued out of it because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ’s cross.

This evil being places a covering over the thoughts and intellect of those who have not yet believed in God, darkening them so that the light of the glory of Jesus Christ does not shine within them; and not only that, he also obstructs even those Christians who have received salvation so that they cannot live that glory. If possible, he attempts to make them once again follow the current of unbelief toward God that leads to destruction, and to draw them back to those who are perishing, never loosening his hand of attack.

For example, looking at other letters written by the Apostle Paul, we find statements such as, “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica,” or, “All who are in Asia have turned away from me. They oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses; they are people with corrupted intellect, failures in regard to the faith.” We can understand that there were truly people who, being enticed to think only about earthly things, seeking stimulation and salvation in a false glory that makes desires their god, were once again drawn toward destruction.

Satan the devil attacks our human thoughts, feelings, and intellect.

The world claims and teaches—and tries to make us think, and actually makes us think—that believing in God is the opposite direction from what is called intellect.

In fact, when one reveals to people around them that he has believed in Jesus and become a Christian, some respond by saying, “Oh dear... how sad. Even such an intelligent person ends up getting into religion after all.”

I myself once had someone fold their hands and make the sign of the cross in front of him and say, half-mocking, “Amen, somen, hiyasomen,” while bowing.

From the perspective of the world, to come to believe in God, to come to know Jesus, might be considered falling into something unfortunate, abandoning one’s intellect.

But Jesus says the opposite, and Solomon—who is said to have been the greatest wise man in human history—says the same as Jesus.

Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and Solomon said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, and fools despise this wisdom and knowledge.”

For people who are made to think that living according to the flow of this world and materialism is the joy of life, not believing in God becomes their boast, their pride.

It may also become the sign of boldness or of having a strong heart.

All the while not realizing that “their soul is being taken by Satan.”

To what extent their souls are being taken—this is recorded in the Gospels and Acts—but even toward Jesus, who lived thirty-three years of public life that were utterly upright, good, righteous, and holy, they gnashed their teeth and opposed Him, attacking Him.

As for the Apostle Paul, there was even a group of people who vowed, “We will not eat anything until we kill Paul.”

It is not normal.

It seems like a condition that can only be described as their intellect and thinking being seized and dominated by something.

They think that they themselves have wisdom, that they are free people, that they are courageous; meanwhile, those of us who believe in the true God are seen as the opposite:

as slaves whose hearts have been captured by something strange, as fearful weaklings who cannot live unless leaning on something, as ignorant people who have abandoned intellect.

But this itself is the strategy of the devil, who places a covering over human thought and intellect and darkens it, so that the light of the gospel relating to the glory of Christ—the image of God—does not shine.

Looking at Genesis chapter 3, it is recorded how the devil hidden in the serpent craftily deceived the people, and how he stirred within them the suspicion that “God is unfair.”

The devil stirs within people the thought that “God alone is enjoying what is good for human beings.”

Then Eve, the first woman, had the warning of God’s love—“You shall not eat. In the day you eat of it, you will surely die”—flying away somewhere; and when she looked again at the tree, she thought, “How unfair that God should keep such a good thing for Himself alone. It looks delightful to the eyes, it looks tasty, and it seems like it could make one wise. For Him to say, ‘Don’t eat this’—God really is unfair.” And she was perfectly deceived by the devil’s scheme.

This is precisely the devil’s typical method.

It is inducing doubt—this is the devil’s regular tactic.

He stirs up questions like, “Is God truly guiding and protecting each step of my walk? That person seems to be living a much better life, so why does God assign me such misfortunes? Is He playing favorites?”—and in the end leads us to the conclusion, “God is unfair.”

But the Bible says,

“From the moment human beings who sinned were expelled from the Garden of Eden, all life is equally painful, difficult, and filled with suffering.”

And at the same time it says, “God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

In other words, people who have money have their own pain, suffering, hardship, and anxiety appropriate to having money; and people who do not have money have their own pain, suffering, hardship, and anxiety appropriate to not having money.

Those with power have their own sort of suffering, and those without power have their own. Those with health have their own kind of suffering, and those without health have theirs. Those with parents have their own kind, and those without parents have theirs. Those who own a car have their own troubles, and those who do not have a car have theirs.

Yet Satan makes us think as though “that is not the case,” and makes us harbor feelings of unfairness, jealousy, conflict, pride, wounded ego, and looking down on one another—and consequently he leads us to deny the existence of God.

A pastor I deeply respect once analogized the “law of conservation of mass”—which says that the total mass remains constant even when the state of matter changes—to what he called “the law of constant total suffering.”

He said, “Just as the scale needle points to the same place whether you weigh yourself wearing clothes or holding the clothes in your hands, the shape of suffering differs for each person, but the total amount of suffering that a person experiences and feels in life is the same for all people.” “This,” he said, “is the biblical picture of human beings living in the world, and also a guideline showing the fairness of God.”

I think, “Ah, indeed. That is true.”

The devil attacks our thoughts in order to draw us away from God.

## **Part Two**

The second scheme of the devil is “to cause fear.”

It is the fear that if one believes in the Lord God, one will face sacrifice and disadvantage, and that things one could do until then will no longer be allowed.

I myself also held such fears before I believed in God and even soon after I believed: “If I start believing in God and Jesus, I probably won’t be allowed to do this or that, and if I make even a small mistake, I’ll receive a big punishment—maybe I’ll be struck by lightning, or fall ill.” This kind of fear.

Emperor Constantine the Great, who in A.D. 313 made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire, is said to have received baptism right before his death.

The reason was that he thought, “If I am baptized and then afterward commit again the sinful actions I have enjoyed until now, I cannot possibly expect God to forgive me.” So he received baptism at the moment of death.

Could there be anything more unfortunate?

He passed through this earthly life without tasting the greatest privilege a human being can have—to believe in Jesus as soon as possible, be freed from the fear of sin and death, hold the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven within, have a contented heart, and live longing for the inheritance of the age to come.

Solomon, whom I mentioned earlier, also said this in Ecclesiastes.

### **Ecclesiastes 12:1–3, 13 (PowerPoint)**

There may be not a few people who are made to think, “If I can believe in God five minutes before I die, that would be a great ending.”

Even Christians who believe in God and in Jesus may have such thoughts flash through their minds:

more than “No matter what happens, God is on my side and loves me,” they hold the fear that “Living in the ways of the flesh and the mind is far more enjoyable, and even if I believe in Jesus, if I don’t live holy and righteous, God won’t leave me alone.”

For example, suppose that one of our children, when they were little, was playing outside and, without meaning to, wet themselves and came home.

They burst open the door and came in, and because they had wet themselves their pants were soaked, and when my wife try to scold them slightly—“Why didn’t you go to the bathroom?”—instead they angrily say, “Mom! It’s because YOU didn’t come open the door quickly that I wet myself! I’m going to change, so hurry and bring me clean underwear and pants!” If a child said this in anger, what would the parent do? Smiling wryly, the parent loses to the child.

This is the relationship between God and us.

Even if someone who has been made a child of God commits sin, the fact that they are a child of God never disappears.

Even if they make mistakes, all they need to do is boldly—almost shamelessly—return again before God.

We must not let go of the most fundamental truth: “God did not make us His children in order to punish us or to make us die, but to be on our side no matter what happens.”

As a parent raising children, the one thing you most do not want your child to do is “not come home.”

No matter what they do, no matter what mistake they make, the parental heart is to want them to at least come home.

That is why the God of the Bible is called the Father, and why God likens Himself to a mother who loves her child.

Satan the devil tries to make us fear returning to the Father God, and leads us not to return, and obstructs us when we try to return.

Therefore, by all means, let us return to God.

God continues to speak to us, “Come home.”

### **Part Three**

The third strategy of the devil is to “discourage” us.

Discouragement and pride are like the two sides of a coin, like the palm and the back of a hand.

Becoming proud and falling into disappointment or discouragement look completely different in appearance and seem the opposite, but I think they arise from the same principle, the same cause.

Both come from relying on oneself, trusting in oneself, and looking at oneself.

The Christian faith is not a training of how much I, this person, can accumulate religious acts, nor is it a battle of how much I can elevate myself.

The Christian faith is not about looking at the condition or the feeling of the one who believes, but the most important point is that the object we believe in is Christ.

The Christian faith is a battle not to believe in “me,” this person, but to believe in Jesus Christ.

Christian faith is not placing the basis on how fervent my faith is, or how wonderful it is, but a battle of how much I trust Jesus Christ, how much I am looking to Jesus.

No matter how bad we may be, no matter how sinful, no matter how lacking, no matter how full of darkness we may be, still there is hope, and the reason we are right now in this place of God's blessing is not because we are basing it on us as human beings, but because we are basing it on our Savior Jesus Christ, right?

Our faith is not that "believing is important," but that "we are believing in Jesus Christ"—that is everything, that is salvation, that is the essential point.

And yet, we often, before we know it, end up fighting not the battle of looking at Jesus Christ, trusting Jesus Christ, believing in Jesus Christ, but the battle of how much / am believing.

When our hearts are set aflame, when we feel our faith is strong, our hearts feel bright, and when the believing feeling within us withers, we get discouraged.

The devil draws us not into the battle of looking at Jesus, but makes us look at me, this person, makes us think about me, this person, makes us stare at me, this person, and while doing so, lures us into the battle of trusting in ourselves, and leads us into discouragement.

The fact that the world is full of plausible-sounding words like "Believe in yourself" is, after all, the flow of this world that Satan has created to throw people into discouragement.

Jesus is the God of love who never changes—yesterday, today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and forever.

When I become exuberant, Jesus becomes exuberant; when I become depressed, Jesus becomes depressed—there is absolutely nothing like that.

And yet, are we not living as though that were the case?

Both discouragement and pride are based on me, this person; so when we feel good, we become proud, and when we lose confidence, we become discouraged.

If we look to Jesus, we can neither become discouraged nor become proud.

Even if we do become discouraged, strength will rise up again; and even if we do become proud, we will again willingly and thankfully choose the place of humility.

A Christian has no boasting and no discouragement.

What we have is only the grace of God.

### **Conclusion**

We have been thinking about the three strategies of Satan the devil, but in the end, all of them are attempts to stir us up so that we fight the devil—or fight within the flow the devil has created—by ourselves, with ourselves alone.

When Jesus had eaten nothing for forty days in the wilderness and was preparing for His ministry, the devil came to Him and tempted Him, saying, “You’re hungry, aren’t you? If you are the Son of God, then turn those stones right in front of you into bread and eat them!” However, how did Jesus respond to that temptation of the devil?

He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Do you understand what kind of battle this is?

The devil pressed Jesus, saying, “Prove yourself by your own ability,” but Jesus responded to the devil’s pressure by saying, “I do not exist based on myself, nor as an independent one by myself; I exist only on the basis of the One who sent Me, and only by His command.”

That is, He was showing us that “placing our basis on the only true God, and living within the relationship with Him, is everything for human beings.”

Our battle is not a battle of how much we push forward “me,” this person, but a battle of how much we return before God, look up to Jesus, and trust the voice of the Holy Spirit.

From the smallest things in our daily life to the most important things, in all those areas Satan presses us, saying, “Not Jesus, not God, not the Holy Spirit—fight with your own strength.” But the posture and faith we should take is to respond, “If you want to fight with me, then first go to the Triune God whom I believe and trust, and ask Him. As for me, I will return to the Father, look to Jesus, and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit.”

Let us pray.

Benediction: Ephesians 6:11