

The lies of Satan

Though Satan often wears a friendly disguise, the tactics he employs for our destruction have not changed since the time of the fall in the garden. First, he attacks or tries to undermine in some way the truth of God's Word and our trust in it. Just a little compromise on a little doctrine, that's all. Life for the Christian and for the church will be so much easier if we just stop insisting on every word. So much opposition could be avoided and so much ridicule prevented if we just dropped such things like the doctrine of creation or the doctrine concerning the proper roles of men and women or the Bible's teaching about chastity before marriage. But his goal is destruction. His intention is to drive a wedge between the Christian and the Saviour by causing us in effect to call God a liar; for that's what we do whenever we deny or contradict any part of His Word. If the devil succeeds in drawing us away from one doctrine, he will have an easier time of it in drawing us away from more and more of God's Word. Those who oppose sound doctrine, St. Paul says, have fallen into the snares of the devil (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Ultimately his goal is to tear us away from the heart and core of God's Word, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that are ours through faith in the saving merit of Christ our Saviour. When he has succeeded in his attacks on that most fundamental doctrine of the Scriptures, church for us will have degenerated into a social club with a cross on the roof. Only then will he be satisfied.

When the devil does not at once succeed in his attacks on doctrine, he may turn his attack to the Christian's life. If he can get pastors and teachers and laity to see their faith only in terms of memorised doctrinal formulae without any follow-through in their lives, then he will have an easy time of it later on in tearing them and others away from the pure doctrine they may have taught. The pure doctrine of the drunkard, the gossip, the gambler, the adulterer, the liar, or the cheat impresses no one; the life of the hypocrite drives away those who might otherwise have listened to the Word. Jesus connects our lives to our doctrine when He tells us, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven,*" (Matthew 5:16). The life that is seen by others as flowing from the Word of God may well draw others to hear that Word. But the hypocrite's life may well become such a mess that he not only repels a potential hearer but he himself finally has no energy or time left for pure doctrine. St. Peter's warning of the devil prowling around like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8) remains a very good one indeed. For if the devil can seduce us into ignoring Peter's warning, then the devil will have already won half the battle. Doctrine and life will be his easy targets, and Christians his easy prey.

Whether the temptation is to dilute sound doctrine or to compromise the Christian life, the devil likes to start out with a small temptation and work up to the bigger ones as one error begets another, and one compromise makes another all the easier. How clear that is already in the Garden of Eden at the time of the fall of Adam and Eve!

This is how the devil so often proceeds: First, he minimises the sin to which he tempts us, lest the conscience be shocked and resist. After he has succeeded in convincing us that sin is trivial and nothing to be concerned about, it is an easy matter for him to seduce into one sin after another, until our fall is complete. Then, after he has seduced us into sin by convincing us that sin doesn't really matter, he comes with his second favourite trick: He maximises

guilt. First, he says the sin is nothing to worry about. Then, after the sin has been committed, he bellows through the conscience: “You did what? And now you imagine that you will be forgiven? Never! Do you think that you can play God for a fool?” He tries to drive us to despair of the grace of God. In Satan’s mind too, doctrine and life are always connected. First, he lies to us about God’s Law and tries to get us to believe that God doesn’t really mean it or take it all that seriously. When he succeeds with that lie, he follows up by lying about the Gospel, insisting that God doesn’t mean that either. Thus he seeks to deceive by bringing God’s children to shame, attempting to destroy their faith. Therefore we must always be on our guard and place our lives completely in the care of Jesus, who has overwhelmingly destroyed the works of the devil. It is in Him alone that we have salvation, and it is His voice of peace and forgiveness that drowns out the lies of the devil.