

No Holds Barred!

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would take your Bible and turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 on page 969, you might be able to follow along there. You may have to share with the person next to you.

It's a great pleasure on your behalf to welcome a class of students from Trinity Western who are studying an introduction to Christianity. It's great to have you with us.

I won't use my only Mandarin phrase because you'll just laugh at me. However, you've landed on a week, you've jumped into the deep end because the first Bible reading we had demons and the second Bible reading is about Satan.

So away we go. Now, as Christians, we believe the Bible teaches that there is only one God and Lord of all, that he made all things, he created all things, as we've just confessed, and he is the judge of all people, and he is personal, invisible, all-powerful, glorious, and very holy.

The Bible also teaches that there is a devil. He is not God. He is a created spiritual being, perhaps an angel, we're not sure, who is real and personal and powerful and proud and evil.

[1 : 36] And the Bible calls him Satan or the devil or the serpent. And although he is not God, and he can never threaten the rule of God, he is filled with malice and hatred and fury and cruelty, and he wages war against the truth of God and against his people.

And it is Satan who lies behind all that is evil in our world. And, of course, there are many sophisticated people today who don't believe that there is a Satan, and that's exactly what Satan wants.

And what that means is that our lives participate in something more than is just human and natural, that there is something beyond and behind our lives and what happens in this world.

And until we begin to understand this, we will never understand the depth and pervasiveness and the stubbornness of evil in our own lives and in the lives of others.

You see, you can't understand anything without a context. A kiss is not a kiss. Is it between lovers? Is it a Judas kiss? You know, a cut on my skin.

[2 : 51] Is it because Jordan stabbed me on the way in as he wanted to? Or is it the surgery Jordan did to pull out something from my arm?

You can't understand anything apart from context. And in this passage, 2 Corinthians 11, there is a small context in Corinth of what's going on there. But the point of the passage is that it reveals that you and I live in a much bigger context today and that the power of Satan is active in our lives and in our world and in our churches.

And unless we understand this, we're not going to make sense of the world because you cannot explain all the evil in the world by natural causes. Despite the fact that in the 20th century, that's what we tried to do.

We tried to eradicate greed and violence and racism and war and it didn't go so well. Because these things can't be put down to psychology or sociology or economics alone.

We are even uncomfortable with this word evil, aren't we? Evil implies some sort of moral absolute. But when you really look at the Holocaust or ethnic cleansing or terrorism, these things have an evil about them that is more than just psychological maladjustment.

[4 : 14] And I think a lot of our thinking about evil is simplistic. I think a lot of Christian thinking about evil is simplistic. The famous quote from C.S. Lewis at the beginning of his book on the Screwtape Letters, he says this, That's very helpful, isn't it?

Because you see, if you have a magical view of reality, and some Christians do, they say, oh, everything is the fault of the devil. It's just the devil. It's just the devil. It's just the devil. And that can be a way of hiding from the truth and avoiding taking responsibility for your contribution to it.

And the reality is that there are human factors involved. In just the same way, the materialistic view, where it says there is no such thing as spiritual evil, there is no such thing as the devil, is just as simplistic.

And it avoids the depth, the radical depth of spiritual evil. And I think the gift of this passage is to show us how Satan works in one particular context.

It's about 50 AD, when the Apostle Paul went over to Greece and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ into this Greek city, a city that loved luxury, money, and physical pleasure.

[5 : 53] And a group of people with great joy came to receive this good news, and a new church was founded. And soon after the Apostle left, a group of new public speakers, teachers, invaded the church, and they began to subtly change the good news, the gospel about Jesus Christ, with very clever lies.

And the passage exposes what's really going on. So I've got three points from this passage today. What is Satan's main ambition? What is his main method?

And we'll just spend a minute or two on a particular case study that Paul gives us in this passage. Firstly then, what is Satan's main aim?

What is his goal? What is his purpose? What is his ambition? And it is this. It is to diminish, or reduce, or weaken, or attack the glory of Jesus Christ.

He can no longer touch Jesus since Jesus has risen to heaven. He can no longer tempt him. So what he does is he blinds, he seeks to blind as many people as he can to the great glory of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 05] And for those who already worship Jesus Christ, he tries to draw us away from our devotion to him. He is trying to attack the glory of Jesus Christ. That was what was happening in Corinth.

That's what's happening in Vancouver. Look at the way the apostle puts it in verses 2 and 3. I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

But I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

This is the language of love. This is the language of relational tenderness and intimacy. And it comes from the Old Testament where God himself not only made his people, but he bound himself to them by a covenant vow.

It's like he married his people. And he says, I will be yours and you will be mine. And now in the person of Jesus Christ, God has given himself to us with such extravagance that he desires that we give ourselves to him above all others.

[8 : 22] This is a Bible view that God desires the intimacy of communion with us, mutual love, mutual care, the affection of giving, receiving. He puts himself forward to us as the great lover, as the ultimate spouse.

So you see, to be led astray from a devotion to Jesus Christ is a deeply personal betrayal. We've spoken about this many times before.

Sin is not so much breaking laws as it is breaking the heart of God. It's like adultery. And that's why the language of the apostle is so hot. He feels a God-like jealousy for these people in Corinth who are being led astray.

And he uses an illustration, perhaps let me put it in modern parlance. Just imagine there is a young couple who become engaged to each other. And a group of guys come to the soon-to-be bride, pretending to be acting on behalf of the husband.

And they seduce her with lies and false promises. And they compromise her sexually. And when she is compromised, they then begin to extort money from her.

[9 : 35] And the reason why they do it is because they hate the husband, soon-to-be husband, so much. That's what's going on in Corinth. You see verse 3 at the end of it?

When we hear the gospel preached, God shines in our hearts.

He shines the knowledge of himself in the face of Jesus Christ. We can see the glory of God when we look at the face of Jesus Christ. And when we hear the preaching of Jesus Christ in his life and death and resurrection, that he became poor for us so that we might become rich.

That he was made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. God opens our eyes to the glory of his face. And he fills us with new affection for Jesus Christ.

And our hearts, we begin to see him as the most brilliant, the most wonderful, the most beautiful and inexpressible thing that we could possibly imagine.

[10 : 46] And we know in our hearts that there's no greater joy than knowing him. And seeing him, we see what God is like. And it fills our hearts with a kind of a hope that we will be with him.

And we delight in him and we seek him. And it burns. You take any story from the life of Jesus. When he was walking past and he saw a funeral and he raised the widow's son back to life and gave him back to the widow.

Or he went out to a leper and he touched him to make him clean. Or when he revealed himself to his disbelieving disciples after his resurrection. As we hear these stories, God stirs up within us a new desire and a sense we didn't have before.

We realize in Jesus Christ, here's what we've been looking for. Here's what we need. But it's absolutely vital that you don't miss, we don't miss the order, the sequence in verse 3.

It's not the affections that come first. It's not the affections that are being led astray. The affections are cooling.

[11 : 56] They're losing their heat. But they are doing so as a result of their thoughts being led astray. See verse 3? Your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

What Satan is targeting primarily and what he wants to lead astray are our thoughts. Which is why we need the constant light of the word of God to keep our affections aflame.

It's like this, the heat of our affections for Christ is stimulated by the light that comes from the face of Jesus Christ. That's why we've got to be really honest with ourselves and say that our behavior and our attitudes really do show what we think about Christ.

So greed, as we've been looking at money for the last few weeks, greed is simply a different thought about God. It's saying, God, you're not going to look after me.

I want more than you've given me. Taking vengeance means I want to be judged. I'm not going to let God be judged. Or to quote one of the commentators, worry is not believing God will get it right.

[13 : 08] And bitterness is believing God got it wrong. Being over busy is not believing the grace of God. Being a snob is not believing what God says about other people.

It has to do with where our thoughts are. And that's why we need to bring ourselves back to Jesus Christ and his gospel, because Satan is seeking to draw our thoughts apart from him and so somehow attack the glory of Jesus Christ.

That's his main ambition. Well, secondly, then, what is his main method? How does he do it? And it's obvious. He tries to bring us to believe lies.

He spreads evil by spreading errors about Jesus Christ. Ignorance about Jesus Christ is far more dangerous than even the seven deadly sins, whatever they are.

I mean, you could probably avoid most of the seven deadly sins and still be completely in the dark about God, have no relationship with Christ, not know his covenant love. Jesus himself spoke about the devil in John's gospel.

[14 : 16] He said, The devil was a murderer from the beginning. He does not stand in the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So lying is the devil's native tongue. He is most at home in lies. This is his great power, and it is exercised in every place in our world, and everywhere you go, you'll find people believing many lies about God and about salvation.

And I know how difficult it is for us to hear this. I would hardly dare say this were it not what the Bible says. I mean, we all think of ourselves basically as pretty sensible, pretty discerning and thoughtful.

We need a special humility to receive this. We need to actually love what is true. And Paul wonderfully exposes how these lies come to us in verse 3.

He refers back to Eve. He says, The serpent deceived Eve by his cunning. The way evil and sin and death entered the world was through deception and cunning.

[15 : 29] In the Garden of Eden, what Satan tried to do is he tried to cut the connection between God and his word. In the first chapters of the Bible, when God created the world and he created the Garden of Eden and he created man and woman to be in the garden, he gave them every tree to eat except one.

And we read in chapter 3 that the serpent was more crafty than any other beast. And as you read chapter 3, it's a sad masterclass in deception.

Satan comes to Eve with the suggestion that what God had said might be up for question. He says, Did God say, You shall not eat of the tree of the garden?

Well, that's not actually what God said. But you see what he's doing? Did God really? Did God really? He's changing the command of God into a question. Maybe. Option. He wants to create just a distance between who God is and what his word is.

And, you know, God doesn't really want the best for you. Perhaps he can't be really trusted. There's another way of looking at these things, a better way than God's. And it's as she begins to believe and trust this lie, she distrusts the truth and goodness of God.

[16 : 43] And her mind is lured. She is misled. And she is deceived. And when God comes to her and says, What have you done? She says, The serpent deceived me.

I think it's amazing to see how this is working in Corinth, don't you? It's working through people who claim to be Christian teachers. Let's look down at verse 4 for a moment. Verse 4.

If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

Amazing, isn't it? These new Christian teachers, they use the language of Christianity, Jesus, spirit, gospel. They kept the facade, but they changed the meaning. They renovated the interior.

And this is a terrible strategy. And it's a temptation we all face. And that is to take the things about Jesus we like, and the things about Jesus that we don't like, we just say, Eh, I don't believe it.

[17 : 54] I want to say to you, that's a wretched marriage strategy. When you get married, to take the things you like about your spouse, and say about the things you don't like, I don't believe it.

It's not going to get you far. I promise you. Of course, there is no other Jesus than the one who came to us in the eyewitness accounts. What Satan wants to do is, he constantly wants us to make Jesus in our own image.

I said this at the nine o'clock, but there were blank stares. When I was a teenager in the 70s, there was a hippie Jesus. I was in Australia, and a lot of the product that came out of California had a hippie Jesus.

He was long hair. His hair had gone blonde in the sun through much surfing, I imagine. He wore denims. He had a very hairy chest. And he said things like, God is radical and cool.

And yes, we used to speak that way as well. I think in the 80s and 90s, that was superseded by the therapeutic gospel.

[19 : 02] That Jesus is there to affirm my worth and self-esteem, to give me positive thoughts about myself, to help me fulfill my potential. I think now, we're facing a West Coast Jesus.

The West Coast Jesus is laid back and helps us live in the now. Never says anything dogmatic or negative. Certainly doesn't believe in judgment.

The Corinthian Jesus, as we've seen, has no room for weakness, or suffering, or poverty. It's all about power and prosperity. It's astonishing how strong the apostle is about them.

Look at verse 13. He says, such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It's no surprise his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. You know this, don't you? I mean, if lies is your stock in trade, you're not going to turn up and announce to yourself, are you?

[20 : 05] Satan's not going to appear with a pitchfork and horns and a red cape and say, look, you know, I'm offering you lies here. No, no, no. He wants to blind us to the goodness of Jesus Christ.

And when we turn to Jesus Christ, God removes the veil from our eyes. And then we with unveiled faces, as we look at the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we become changed and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

And what the lies of Satan do is they try and cover the glory of Jesus Christ. And we're no longer transformed. We become increasingly conformed to the standards of those around us. His main ambition is to attack the glory of Christ.

His main method is through lies. And thirdly, just a minute or two on this, there's a case study in the middle of the passage. Did you notice in verses seven to 11, it's all about money?

Because some of the lies the false teacher was spreading about Paul came from the, came not just from the gospel he preached, but the way he lived. Because the way Paul decided to live when he was in Corinth, absolutely confronted the central idol in the Corinthian culture, which was money.

[21 : 20] And Paul has told us, if you've been here weeks past, that the basic motivation of the false teachers is money. Remember in chapter two, he said they are peddlers of God's word.

A peddler is a wine seller who waters down the wine for financial profit. So these false teachers were diluting and changing the message about Jesus Christ for the sake of money.

Their basic motivation was financial gain. Before they had come, when the apostle first went to Corinth, he made this decision that he would not receive any financial support from the Corinthian congregation.

It was his perfect right to, as he says in 1 Corinthians 9. But he decided to forego that right. And he didn't receive any financial support.

Instead, he worked with his hands. He became a tent maker. And when he ran out of money, he asked for support from the poorer Christians up in Macedonia. It was a massive blow to the ego of the Corinthians.

[22 : 20] I mean, Corinth was the wealth capital, certainly outside Rome, of the world. But why did he do that? Why did he set aside his rights? It's an interesting case because he did it to show them what Jesus looks like.

To give them something of the benefit of Jesus' death and resurrection. You remember he says in chapter eight, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

So here in this passage, when the false teachers accuse Paul of not loving the Corinthians because he won't take their money, or of sinning against the Corinthians in verse seven, because he wouldn't take their money, it's because they could not believe that someone would say no to money.

In this area, Paul decided to live out the truth of the gospel following in the footsteps of Jesus, and it was profoundly counter-cultural. And as the truth of Jesus was lived out, it exposed the shallow motives and the lies of the false teachers.

It's interesting, isn't it? By giving up his rights, the grace of God flowed through him to the Corinthians, and now Paul is writing so that the grace of God will continue to flow, but it won't if their thoughts are taken captive by Satan, but it will if they come back to Jesus Christ.

[23 : 49] So what does this all mean for us? There's a lot of content there. I think it means essentially one thing, and that is if we want to move this direction, we have to do all we can to receive and to experience and to promote the glory of Jesus Christ.

And like the Apostle Paul, we have to think about what we do and our attitudes that will promote the truth of his glory. And I think that happens in a number of different ways, but primarily by something of a fresh understanding of two of the basic disciplines of the Christian life.

Let me explain. So two of the basic disciplines of the Christian life are reading the Bible and praying. But when we read the Bible, it's not like we're reading a newspaper.

One of the prayers in the prayer book says, we hear, we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. That's a sort of a meditation, isn't it?

If Satan's ambition is to attack the glory of Christ, and if his main method is through lies, what we have to do is we have to keep looking and learning to Jesus Christ and from Jesus Christ, and pray for the humility and the hunger before his word to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.

[25 : 13] We must not underestimate the power of Satan. We must not underestimate our own gullibility. But if you've begun to follow Jesus Christ, I say this, you have no need to fear Satan.

Because the power of Jesus Christ and the power of his word is more than victorious over the devil. He is a defeated enemy. And if we hold the word of God in our hearts, we can even mock Satan.

And I think that's why, in chapter 11 and 12, which we'll see more of next week, the Apostle Paul gets a sort of a jaunty tone.

He's picking up the Old Testament prophets of mocking idolatry and mocking Satan. Martin Luther, the great Christian theologian, said, the best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.

Bear that in mind. And secondly, think differently about our prayers. Jesus himself, the Lord Jesus himself taught us, every day pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[26 : 30] So for every one look at Satan, we need to take 10 looks at Jesus Christ. We are no match for Satan on our own, and we need to pray for help and for strength.

We need to call out to him daily for mercy and protection. Confess to him the lives you've begun to believe. Ask him to deliver you from the evil one. And if these prayers are new to you, I'd like to give you three prayers, three little tiny prayers from the Book of Common Prayer, which we're going to finish with.

So if you take this wine-coloured prayer book from your pew, and turn to page 536. Page 536.

These are from the service of holy baptism of such as are of riper years. And I'm just going to pray the three prayers in the middle of the page, and then Mel will continue leading us in prayer.

So I invite you to kneel as we pray these prayers. Thank you. Amen.

[27 : 52] O Lord of hosts, Before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver us, thy servants, from the power of Satan.

Amen. Cast out of our hearts every evil imagination, and everything which exalts itself against the knowledge of thee. Bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Amen. And grant that we may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.