

Satan's Methods of Attacking the Christian's Assurance

by Tim Conway

Okay, what I want to do is basically take off where I was last week. What I did was, I went back and I wanted to revisit Assurance. I just felt like when we dealt with it about a month ago, I really felt that I wanted to say more and think more about it. And last week we spent, again, quite a bit of time on just talking about the counterfeit Christian, and how the devil tends to promote false assurance, false peace, false joy in the false Christian. But the devil is very strategic - we hear about his stratagems, his wiles. We know about those from Scripture. He attacks assurance. Of course, you got a lost person, he wants to convince them everything is okay. He doesn't want them thinking it's not okay. He doesn't want them pursuing Christ. When you have the Christian on the other hand, he can't steal away their salvation, but what he wants to do is make them miserable, and there's no better way to make Christians miserable than by having them doubt whether or not they're genuinely converted. And he's got strategic ways that he seeks to attack.

We have a number of different people in our church that seem to have a susceptibility to this. I think the reality is, the devil is going to try to attack assurance in every genuine Christian at some time. And I don't think he uses the same mannerisms, the same methods, with every single one of God's people, because he knows our propensities, he knows how each one of us is wired. And there are certain ways that each one of us is wired differently than the next person. I want to go through some of these, and the first one we began to deal with last week, but it's basically this: He comes to the Christian and he says, "You can't know that you're saved." To some he seeks to convince, "You just can't know." And the thing is, a lot of times that attack comes through false teaching. You say, "What do you mean?" I mean, there are circles where basically the mindset is that if you're overconfident about your being a Christian, it's presumption. And it's viewed that way. It's actually anathematized in the Roman Catholic Church.

Now we don't need to go there. The Roman Catholic Church doesn't have the gospel, they've abandoned that. For them to say you can't know— see, if you can know "I'm a Christian," you don't need them. They are there telling you, "Well, if you look to us - you can't know - but we're probably going to get you through in the end. But you need us, and you need the priesthood; and the priesthood makes money that way because you need them to get you through, because you can't really know, you can't be certain." But there's other circles. There's circles of

Reformed people. There are circles where you have to be so unworthy and so miserable, and we talked about this last time. Some of those circles, I mean, I'll call them out. I was exposed to them in Michigan. There's a group called The Strict Baptists. I remember rubbing shoulders with some of those guys when I was first converted, and it's the same kind of circle, it's the same flavor, that John Sytsma came from. John was an elder in Netherlands Reformed Church.

Again, these churches seem to put a preeminence on being miserable. In fact, their assurance comes from lacking assurance. It's like you need to go about with this mindset, "Oh, I'm so unworthy, and woe is me, and we just can't know, and we're all hopeful." And it seems like they're waiting for this experience to take place. And so, you get these circles where it's almost sinful and terrible to say that you have any assurance whatsoever. And when you go into those kinds of circles, you find that the people are miserable. And so, that's great! I mean, the devil would love to have, not just individual Christians, but whole churches where the people are just morbid and miserable. And one of the things that I've noticed is, the singing rarely is lively in those circles. It's more like a dirge. It's more like everything has to be depressed, and dragged out, and dull, and almost mournful. You want to know about it? Sid, what did they call "It is well with my soul"? "IS IT well with my soul?" They retitled it in those circles.

Anyway, open your Bibles to 1 John 5:13. We have to go back to this. There's many other verses, but as we talked about last time, it's very evident from many doctrines in Scripture - the doctrine of prayer - we're supposed to boldly approach the throne of grace. Boldly. How're you going to boldly come if you're full of doubt? When you come to the doctrine of the fear of man, the doctrine of money and greed we looked at last time, coming from Hebrews 13; you have so many doctrines - the doctrine of peace, the doctrine of joy - these different doctrines which are basically built on the assumption that you have assurance. When you look at 1 John 5:13, it's one of the clearest texts in your Bibles, that those who believe are being exhorted-- you have to recognize, this is towards the end of the letter. And what he's really referring to is, the entire letter has been written so that you who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that you have eternal life. The New Testament exhorts us to assurance. You see, there are people who are afraid to be happy. They think it's presumption. But don't, don't be afraid to be happy. Don't be afraid to be full of joy. Don't be afraid to be a people who are confident. How can you boldly approach the throne of grace unless there's confidence there?

So, that we may know. Listen, the thing about it is, when you get these people with the long faces in some of these circles who are afraid to be happy, "Oh, we are so unworthy, who are we?" But you know what they're doing? They're

looking at themselves. We are unworthy. Of course we're unworthy! We're all unworthy. Do you know what the foundational doctrine of assurance is? It's the doctrine of justification by faith. We have to come back to that reality again and again and again, that we are bad people. We are bad people who have gone to Christ because we're bad people. We're diseased people; we have these running sores of the soul. We go broken, we go bankrupt; and what we find in Christ satisfies everything. It satisfies the Father. It pays fully. It gives us everything that we need for salvation. We are accepted in Him. That is the foundation. I'll tell you, every single lie the devil throws at God's people, I'll guarantee you this, you have to come back to the doctrine of justification by faith. We're justified by faith. We have to come back to that doctrine again and again, where it's "I am unworthy, but praise God my hope is in Him and what He has done."

Look, as Christians, are we new creations? Yes! Have we been set free from the dominion of sin? Isn't that what Romans 6 says? Yes! But the thing is, sin is still a plague to us. And we still, like little children, do sin and need the Advocate with the Father. And we have sins that we need to confess, and He's faithful and just to forgive our sins. We need to go back. We need that Advocate. We need the cleansing of the blood. That's the root.

Okay, so one of the ways he comes in is this: "You can't have assurance." And like I said last week, I was just informed recently that we have a sister in our church who believes that you can't have assurance. And I think one of the text, or sort of texts, is like that found in Matthew 24, that says, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." And so what people begin to think is, "Well, if I have to make it all the way to the end to be saved, and I haven't actually made it all the way to the end yet, how do I know I won't fall out?" Now that may seem logical, and some people have run with it that way. In fact, the sister in our church was using that very logic. Do you know what the problem with that logic is? . That is a major snare to that logic. You see, that is what keeps us from carnal logic. What? Scripture. You've got to know your Bible. This is essential in every aspect of doctrine. The way you keep from excess, the way you keep from error is you know your Bibles. Because, typically, when you begin to go down a road of logic, what you have to do is you have to begin to ask yourself, "Does Scripture square with that? Does Scripture in other places back that? If I'm comparing Scripture to Scripture, is the case made everywhere in every way I look at this?"

And you would say this: To say that I need to endure to the end - do we need to endure to the end to be saved? Yes. But that doesn't mean I can't be confident that God has already saved me now, even though I have to endure to the end to ultimately and fully be saved to the uttermost. We are being saved. Scripture says we were saved, we're being saved, we will be saved. There is a

process of salvation. But that doesn't in any way undo the reality that I was justified in the past, and that I belong to the Lord, and that I already have eternal life. I mean, He says if I come to Him He will raise me up on the Last Day. What that means is, when I went to Him in the beginning, the fact He's going to raise me up on the Last Day is certain. And you say, "Where is that?" That's several places in John 6, John 6:44 being one of the passage. I think the other one is John if I'm not mistaken.

But here's another way the devil comes at us. He will say to us, "If you... Isn't it amazing, his strategies, his wiles - it's oftentimes pushing us to the excess. And it's like way out here on this edge, "You can't know you're saved! It's presumption." "Oh, you're the kind who's convinced from 1 John 5:13 that Christians should have assurance. Okay, I'm going to come at you from another direction: If you don't have assurance, you're not saved." All the way the pendulum swings, all the way out to the other side. And so, now he comes in and he says, "If you doubt, you can't be saved. How could you be saved if you don't have assurance?" But notice the wording of 1 John 5:13. It's essential that you notice this. Again, we have to confront... Look, the devil is a liar. So how do you confront a liar? With the truth. Thy Word is truth. That's where we go. I guarantee you this, God has told us that Scripture is God-breathed and it is there to make the man of God complete. When it comes to doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, it will arm you. Our defense against the devil is Scripture. And I'll tell you this, I know this for a fact: Every single lie that we are confronted with by the devil; the answer to it, the truth that answers it, is found in Scripture. Guaranteed. Never think that you're being attacked in some way or by some lie that there isn't a sufficient answer to in Scripture if you'll dig and find it.

But notice here. 1 John 5:13. Notice what it says. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." Do you see what's happening? These people are believers already, but John is recognizing they may lack assurance and need to be encouraged to know the reality of who they are. Do you see that? He says he's writing to those who believe, that they may have assurance. His whole point is he recognizes true believers may lack assurance, and that's why he's writing this book. And you know what? That's essential because we get conscientious individuals. I mean, we tend to get people sometimes who are over much self-examining. You say, "Self-examination is biblical." Is it? Yep. , both of them tell us to examine ourselves. But you get some people who examine themselves way too much. They look at Christ too little, and they look at themselves too much. People that do that are going to end up miserable, typically.

And of course, God knows that there are those who are wired that way—too scrupulous. But again, we need to come back to this reality, we've got to remember all the time: we are justified by faith. Anybody quote Romans 5:1? "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Right. Notice that. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Don't eliminate the aspect of peace that God deals with, like in Isaiah, where that person whose mind is stayed on Him, He will keep in perfect peace. Don't just look at it like, "Well, theoretically I'm not at war with Him." Does it mean that? Yes, it means that. But don't get away from the fact that Jesus says, "My peace I leave with you." When the Scriptures talk about peace, it doesn't just mean that the warfare has ended. He's talking about, remember, "Come unto Me and I'll give you rest. I'll give you rest for your soul." But where does that flow from? Justification by faith. I mean, the reality is (1 John), I can be a believer but need to be encouraged in my assurance. And if I'm a believer, by faith I'm justified, and my standing is perfect in Christ.

Look, the reality is this, you may have doubts about your standing, but if you know yourself to be a sinner, and you've ceased to rely on your own works and look only to the Lord, and you're not putting confidence in the flesh - I mean, remember Philippians 3 - you're not putting confidence in the flesh; if that's true of you, and you say, "I'm full of these doubts, and I don't have any hope except Christ's blood, His righteousness. I don't have any hope. I know I can't perform this well enough." Listen, maybe you're there, saying, "I just don't know where I stand." But if you can say, "I know my only confidence is in Christ." If you say that, you're a Christian. You are a Christian. Nobody whose hope is in Him and His cross work, His life, His perfection; if that's where your confidence is, you will never be ashamed. No matter how you may doubt in this life, no matter how you may tether back and forth, no matter how you may struggle. Now look, the reality is this, if you lack assurance you're a defective Christian. You say, "What do you mean?" I mean, you're supposed to have assurance. God wants you to have assurance. is pressing you towards having that assurance.

And, like I say, there's so many doctrines in the Scripture that tend to bear witness to this reality. Like what? The doctrine of joy - "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice." But I'll tell you that, even right there, you can find in that text the doctrine of justification by faith. You say, "Where?" Well, I would say this, Paul didn't come along and say, "Go look in the mirror, examine yourself over and over and over, and find joy in that." He said, "Rejoice in the Lord." What does that mean? It means I'm rejoicing in what the Lord has done for sinners. That's the reality. You see, Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS. There's never a reason [not to]. In other words, no matter what lie the devil comes with, God is saying, "Rejoice in the

Lord always." See, there's always a reason for the genuine Christian to look at what has happened there. And you know what I find? I find that true Christians, as much as they may doubt and struggle, and have the scrupulous conscience be over self-examining, you put them in front of a good song being sung, up on that screen, and you get their mind off of themselves for a second, and they're rejoicing inside, because their hope is there. They see that Christ set forth in "And Can It Be," or they see it up there in those songs, and suddenly they light up inside. Their confidence is there.

Then they're done singing, and now they're listening to the preaching. And unless it's absolutely on "justification by faith" (they glory in messages like that). But oh, if you start getting messages on Christian conduct, and the way the Christian should live, then all of a sudden, "Woe is me!" And the preacher, he's looking at Grace House women who have false professions, and he's bringing out the shotgun and taking aim — bang! And you know who he hits? He hits the sister in the third row back, who he wasn't even aiming at (he's every bit confident she's a Christian); and she's just taking it right between the eyes. And she's like, "Ohh, I must not be saved." That's what happens a lot of times. Look, the truth is, Scripture wants us rejoicing. And if we're not rejoicing we should be dealing with ourselves. You say, "What do you mean dealing with ourselves?" I mean, you know how David dealt with himself? He asked, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" He dealt with himself. Lloyd-Jones has a book on Spiritual Depression, where it's based on that reality. Dealing with yourself. If you're not rejoicing, you should be dealing with yourself. You say, "What does that even mean?" I mean, you should be preaching the gospel to yourself. You should go back to the doctrine of justification and really remember what it is, and what you have to rejoice in. Again, I come back to this, if your confidence is in Him; you know you're a sinner, you feel it, you feel you have no confidence in the flesh.

What's another strategy of the devil? How about this one: "You're no Christian because of your past." Now, that can come out in two ways. Perhaps there are people, I mean, I've heard of examples. I don't feel vulnerable to this attack, maybe some of you do. Maybe you could speak to it. Anybody here ever feel vulnerable to attacks because of the greatness of your sin in the past?

[James]: When you say "in the past," are you referring to post-conversion?

[Tim]: Either. Just from the past. Maybe no, not as a Christian. I want to deal with that under another heading. But I'm talking your past life when you were lost. Maybe you lived so wickedly when you were lost. You raised your hand, but you were thinking after you were saved, right? [Brother]: "I was thinking both." You've actually struggled with that? You've struggled with doubt over how bad you were

when you were lost? [Brother]: "Yeah." But again, we come back to the doctrine of justification by faith. It's really the answer to that.

Do any of you remember what happened to Mrs. Lloyd-Jones? When they were at Sanfields in South Wales, she was on a bus one day, and a guy got on the bus. And he very pointedly asked her if she was saved. Hey, this is the pastor's wife, and this guy was very bold. He asked her if she was saved, and she wasn't. Does anybody remember what she struggled with, as far as her past? Being too good. It wasn't her badness she struggled with. She felt like if she could have been one of these wretched people like she saw being saved through her husband's preaching; she felt like, then she could know she was converted if her life had transformed. But you know where Lloyd-Jones took her? Again, back, not to the doctrine of regeneration, because you know what? The doctrine of regeneration is a glorious doctrine. But that person who basically lived a very moral life, and that got converted, that stark difference is sometimes harder to see. That can especially be true with children who get saved, people saved in their younger years, people who were raised in very godly families and didn't go off into all the sin and debauchery that many of us have. And then to be radically saved out of that. And so you get these people, and sometimes I think, that, in their past, can be a hindrance as much as anything.

How about this: Variations in experience. And what I don't mean here is, my experience vs yours. When I talk about variations in experience, what I mean is you come to the Lord and you get saved, and you experience an incredible joy. But as you live your Christian life, you come into seasons that are dry, and you feel dead. In fact, brother Kyle was telling me at the Men's Retreat, he's thinking about bringing some messages on the dark night of the soul. And you come into those seasons, and you can begin to think, "What is this?" I mean, Christianity was so glorious in the past, but now it just seems like I'm walking around in the dark. And you can feel that. I mean, have any of you ever been to the place in the Christian life where you feel like you lost something? It's like that closeness that you had, that joy that you had, the sweetness that you had; you look up one day and it's, "Where is it?" And the devil's right there, and he's saying, "It was never real. You were like the one in the Parable of the Soils. You sprang up quickly and you've withered. You weren't real." You see, we can be vulnerable right there.

Brethren, I would say this, if your life knows nothing of this, you don't know anything about these variations, you don't know anything about seasons of dryness or God hiding His face; the reality is, that is suspect in itself. That would seem more dangerous actually. That seems more like the counterfeit that the devil is just kind of leaving alone, because the reality is, with the true child of God, the devil is going to attack us. He is going to level assaults on our assurance. And the

truth is, that God in no way promises us that He will prevent the devil from doing that. In fact, we know that He does allow the devil to do those things. He allowed the devil to sift Peter. He allowed the devil to do to Job what he did to Job. Let's just watch David. You know what's beautiful about the Psalms? It's all experiential. Go watch David. Over here, he is praising the Lord, he's talking about his own righteousness. Over here, he's bemoaning his sin. Over here, he's asking himself why he's cast down. Isn't that the life of the Christian? I mean, that's the reality, that there are ups and there are downs. There's this reality.

One of the things as well is, like I've noticed, I know this, that we're still in the body. And so often, our physical condition... I mean, I highly recommend that people exercise. You know why? I am convinced that lack of exercise - if you let this body grow sluggish and unfit, and you allow yourself to eat rotten, it affects you. I mean, having migraines affects me. Having different physical things happen. We can be up and down, we can be back and forth. There's variations in our experience. There's physical elements to all of it. But I'll tell you this, the confidence in the midst of all of it are these promises like, "Through many tribulations." But at the same time, the work that He starts He's going to finish. He is going to raise me up on that Last Day. I recognize this, there are times He's going to withdraw His face. It tests us. It shows how badly we want Him. You remember what was happening to David? He was saying, "My soul is thirsting, it pants for God." There are times God hides His face on purpose to test us, but it can be miserable seasons.

But the devil can be right there and just say, "You see, you've gone into this season and God has hid His face because God hates you. You're not His." But that's not true. Again, it comes back to the doctrine of justification by faith. And what do I mean? Faith is, you trust what Christ did on that cross, and you know no other trust; because if that's where your trust is, we can trust in that love. You remember the song "Love That Will Not Let Me Go"? And if my hope is in Christ, it's not going to let me go, because that is what it is to be a real Christian.

And then, let's come over to the other variation in experience, in the sense of "my experience is different than your experience." I've seen Christians who struggle with assurance because of that. You know what? Martin Lloyd-Jones was against testimonies for this reason. And I know people who have heard Paul Washer's testimony, and they hear different radical testimonies, and they look at that and they say, "I wasn't saved that way, so I'm [not real.]" And you know what happens? The devil will come right in there and say, "Yeah, those radical conversions are the only true ones. The reason your experience wasn't like theirs is because you're not real." But again, it comes back to justification by faith. Where's your hope? God doesn't say you have to have a certain experience to be

saved; God says you need to trust His Son to be saved. And you know what? All you have to do, again, if you go to Scripture, the answers to all these things are found in Scripture.

In the previous one, go look at David. Go look at the experiences of God's people. In this one I would say the same thing: Look at the salvation experiences. How was Timothy saved? "Well, I grew up under a godly grandmother and a godly mother." Do you know when you were saved? "No, I was exposed to the Scriptures as a child and I don't really know when I was saved." That's what my wife would say. She would say she knows the year, maybe even the three months; but if you asked her to peg the day, she doesn't know. If you asked the apostle Paul to tell you the day, he knows the exact day. You see, the biblical experiences are different. And so, we can answer the devil that way. Some people feel like - bang! - the switch came on in a dark room. Other people, it's more like the sun rising. You can't really tell exactly when it went from being dark to being light. It just kind of happened slowly. Or you even think about the salvation experiences of the Macedonians over against the Corinthians. You find the Corinthians are still walking in all sorts of sin after they're saved; and yet it seems like the Macedonians, who Paul set forth as such an example, it seems like they excelled and were running so much better.

It's like, even in our experience that way, some get saved and they can take off running. Again, my wife's experience and my experience are radically different, and what God did with us in the first several years after we were saved. I mean, I kind of feel like God allowed me to come out of the gates at a full run, whereas my wife got out of the gate slower. But she picked up speed to the point where she passed me. I mean, that's what it feels like has happened.

Another big one is this: it's misinterpreting God's dealings with us. Do you know how often Scripture has to tell us, "If you're God's children, you're going to suffer. And if you don't suffer, you're not legitimate children"? Do you know why Scripture has to emphasize the suffering of the Christian so much? Because this is such a huge place of attack upon God's people to challenge their assurance. Why? You know why. Because we're vulnerable. Okay, we watch our friends: they get married, I don't get married. What am I Lord, a stepchild? And the devil is right there to say, "That's exactly what you are." Every Christian feels this. They feel the loneliness of suffering something that, at least, they're imagining nobody else suffers. And the devil is right there to tell you that too: "Look at this. Look at what God is putting you through. He's not putting anyone else through that." Actually, He's putting a lot of other people through it, and they're going through other trials; and many of them much worse than your trials. But the devil is right there to say, "No, their lives are good. You're the one who's got the raw deal here."

And then what happens is, we're kind of like Habakkuk, we're looking for an answer: "Lord, answer us here. How can this be? How can all this be happening to us?" And there is silence. And oftentimes, the Lord brings silence because He wants us to trust Him and He wants us to seek Him all the more diligently. But the devil is there, saying, "He won't even answer you. Come on, if you had children you'd answer your children if they were crying out. What kind of Father do you think He is? He doesn't want anything to do with you." And, in our immaturity or in our childishness, we listen to the devil. We actually listen to him, and it's like, "Yeah." We go into this pity party. But remember what Hebrews 12 says, there's discipline for the child of God. And if you're not exposed to that discipline - the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives. And you remember what Paul and Barnabas told those churches as they were going through all the churches there in Acts 14? "He was strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Now you got to hear him. You got to hear what he was doing. He was encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom.

Encourage them to continue in the faith? Yes, because when you face trials, that is exactly what's being challenged - your faith. Are you going to trust the Lord? Or are you going to throw in the towel? That's the test. That's always the test. I like how Jesus said it in John 16:1, "I've said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." I often think about that text. "I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away. In other words, if I didn't tell you that you were going to face the kind of persecution you're going to face, if I didn't tell you ahead of time, you guys would probably become so discouraged, and the devil would get a foot in there, and you'd fall out. I'm telling you this to keep you from falling away. Don't fall away because they put you out of the synagogues, because they treat you the way they're going to treat you— and they're going to put some of you to death, and they're going to persecute you, and they're going to reject you, and they're going to do the things to you that they've done to Me. And when they do that, don't question the Lord. You need to know ahead of time that this is what's coming. This is what you're going to be faced with."

Look, God has ordained your sufferings so that they will be different. Sometimes our sufferings are simultaneous. Sometimes we suffer because of the same event or circumstances, you know, a trial can come on a whole church at once. But oftentimes, God is constructing our sufferings uniquely for us. And what happens is, we recognize that we're getting treated differently than others are being treated. And it can lead us to unhappiness, it can lead us to insecurity, it can lead us to self-pity, it can lead us to misunderstandings. Listen to this text, you

know this, "If you are children, you are heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ - what? - provided we suffer." You're only a child if you suffer. But the devil is right there to say, "You're not one of God's children if He treats you like this." And Scripture is saying, "You're not God's child UNLESS He treats you that way. It's not meant to destroy us, it's meant to test us. It's meant to strengthen us, it's meant to build us up. "Provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." That's the reality.

God puts us through the wringer, He puts us in the fire, to take the dross out, to make us pure, to make us like Christ. God often hides His face. You know what? If you carry your children around all the time - you want them to learn to walk - but you actually carry the child all the time. You put him on your shoulders all the time. Guess what he's not going to do. He's never going to learn to walk. But you throw your child out, not just on level ground, throw them out where there's a bunch of obstacles and everything, and what you're going to find is they're going to learn to stand, they're going to mature. This is what the Lord does. You remember what the Apostle Paul says? "I've learned how to be abased and how to abound." What? You're a child of the King! How dare you even talk about being abased? Don't these Charismatics all say, "If you don't have riches and all manner of stuff, it's because you lack faith, it's because you are this or that. I mean, certainly, God wants you rich!" No. Actually, God never said that He wants you rich in this world. In fact, it's often the poor that He saves. And the reality is that the apostle Paul said, "I have learned to be both abased, and I've learned to abound. I've learned to have everything taken away."

He abases us because, why? The truth is, difficulty in life produces - what does it produce? It produces prayerful people. You ever notice you pray desperately when things get hard? God wants us to be prayerful people. We tend to not be so prayerful when the sun is shining, and the bank accounts are full, and everything is good. We know that. Trials tend to make us think, to dig, to pray. They strengthen us. I remember some years ago reading the Pastor Shi biography. He was a Chinese pastor ordained by Hudson Taylor, back in the 1800s. China is the same in many ways today as it was back then, 150 years ago. They sued everybody. They're still like that. They sue everybody. And so, those Christians who were in that church with Pastor Shi, they determined that as Christians they would never sue anyone. And when the lost people found that out, they tried to take advantage. They would move fences so that they would take their land. Number of things happened. And what Pastor Shi recognized is, when it was a new believer, if the new believer lost, say, their land, or the lost people came in and took some of their geese or their pigs, what they noticed was that, trusting the

Lord, God would allow those things to be restored. And they would be all happy, and their faith would be vindicated.

But they noticed very specifically that the more mature the Christian was, the less likely God would have the thing restored that they were gypped out of, or swindled out of, or had stolen from them. He recognized that because the more mature and more able to deal with that, God pushed them further to mature them more, to develop more thoroughly the spiritual muscle. Brethren I'll tell you, it's through these difficult times that we really come to know the Lord. And I'll tell you, there is nothing that so exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, as coming across a suffering Christian, who their hope and their joy is just so... I mean, I think just recently about Rione, and watching her; over against, you know, you're struggling, and you're miserable, and you're full of self-pity. What a horrible testimony. Because remember what Paul said, I count these sufferings to be as nothing, compared to this glory that's going to be revealed to us. In fact, to the Corinthians, he talks about "momentary light affliction." It's not even to be compared to the eternal weight of glory. That's the reality.

Now here's another place the devil comes in, and this goes back to what Travis was saying. This is a big one: When we fall into sin. When we fall into sin (and I brought this one up last week actually,) but when we fall into sin, the devil is right there: "Look at you. You can't be a Christian." But again, we need to remember, what's the devil trying to say to us right there? "True Christians never sin." That's not true. True Christians do sin. And if you say you don't, 1st John 1 would say that you're not even genuine. The truth is, true Christians sin. And all you have to do is go to Scripture to see it. We can go and we can point out sin on the part of David, sin on the part of Abraham, sin on the part of Noah, sin on the part of Peter, sin on the part of the Corinthians, sin on the part of the Hebrews, sin on the part of the Galatians. We can go to Scripture and find God's people, even Paul himself; I mean, you remember they smote him on the cheek because he spoke in a way that he wasn't supposed to speak about the high priest. But the reality is, he himself said he pressed towards the mark and he hadn't yet achieved, he hadn't laid hold yet of what he was being laid hold for. He was stretching and seeking earnestly to achieve, and reach, and go on.

Listen, if the devil comes in and says "because you've sinned you can't be a Christian," where does that come from? Are you gonna buy that? Are you gonna fall into that, and say, "Oh yeah. After all, true Christians must be perfect. All Christians are perfect. And yeah, I haven't been perfect, so I must not be a Christian." Of course, the Bible doesn't teach that. In fact, if you say you have no sin, then you find yourself having a problem. We are going to sin. We're not yet perfect. Does sin have dominion over us? No. Romans 6:14 says, "Sin shall not have dominion over

you." But we sin. There is sin that comes into our life. And it's almost like, well, yes, we were these horrible sinners when we first came to Christ. But it's like the devil would have us believe, "Yeah, but now that you say you're a Christian and you believe you've been saved, now there's no excuse. You knew better, and you sinned in the midst of great light, and so that's it." He can come in and make you feel like you've just lost everything. The devil can throw people into utter despair.

It's like, now that we're Christians, well, you have no right to sin. But the fact is, let me tell you what that is, it's you going back to a works mentality. Because you have to remember what Colossians 2:6 says; we keep looking at that over the years. But Colossians 2:6 is basically the text that emphasizes the reality that the way you start the Christian life by faith, is the way you continue. Remember this: "The just shall live by faith." That faith is not ambiguous. That faith is in the work and person of Jesus Christ. Don't look at faith as something separate. Sometimes we can hear 'faith', and it's like, "Oh yeah, yeah," and it just becomes this nebulous, ambiguous thing. Like, "Oh yeah, we have this. What is this?" Well, you need to remember what it is: It is me looking outside myself at what Jesus Christ did, and having confidence totally in who He is and what He accomplished. That's the reality. And when the devil comes in, and he begins to say, "You sinned, you can't be God's," you just look at him and say, "You know what you're wanting me to do? You're wanting me to feel accepted or not accepted based on my works. But the just shall live by faith, not by works. You're calling me to continue in a different way than I started."

Colossians 2:6, somebody open that. Somebody open up your Bible to that text and read it. "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith." Right. Walk in Him the same way you came to Him, the same way you received Him, the same way you started. How did you start? See, this is what we have to remember. When I came to him that first day, I was broken. I was at the bottom. I didn't have any hope. I didn't have any place to go, but to Him. I didn't have any hope; I was bad, and I was going to hell. See, that's how I came. And what he's saying is, that is the way to walk, where you come to Him and you recognize, "Without Him I'm broke, I'm empty, I'm bankrupt, I'm unworthy, I deserve hell." It's the same way. I tell you, we keep coming back to this, but the doctrine of justification by faith is the Satan-resister. This is the reason why God would have us come back to the Lord's Supper, again and again and again. You know why? He wants us to look at that cross, again and again and again, and see on that cross Christ being made sin in our place. That's the reality.

And then I would say this, the devil is very quick to come in and accuse us, and tell us that certain things are sin when they're not sin. We kind of dealt with

this about 3 weeks ago when we talked about the Blitz. But he comes in and he does that. It's like, "You can't do that, that's sin!" And then, last week, I mentioned what Luther said to Melanchthon. He told Melanchthon, "Sin boldly." The reality is this, our faith, (see, whatsoever is not of faith is sin), but our faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. And what Scripture says, Jesus said, "My sheep follow Me, and they know My voice." And the thing is, the devil comes in like an angel of light, and he will speak like he's God, and he will tell you, "That's sin!" And it's not sin, but he's dealing with people with sensitive consciences. And he'll tell you, "That's sin," and he'll bring you into bondage. You remember that truth of Galatians 5:1? For freedom, Christ has set you free. You are free. Only don't use the freedom for the sake of the flesh; use your freedom to love. Even the rich are told, God has given them those things to enjoy. He wants them to be liberal, and to help, and to look out for times of need.

But we can get into this... sometimes it's just by the conviction of other people. We can get around other people with convictions that don't come from Scripture, and their convictions assault our consciences. And the devil can use people like that and seek to bring us into bondage, and rob us of assurance. Because you get to the place where you feel like, "Oh, I have to do what that person's conscience [believes]. And then it's like, when you follow that path, there's not joy in it. And then if you resist it, the devil's saying, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. And you were really believing that you should do that." And sometimes you just have to say, "Stop! What does Scripture say? Does God forbid that anywhere in Scripture? Not just deductive reasoning because God said that over there, and I'm supposed to draw third- and fourth-level [conclusions].

You need to listen to what God says. We need to listen and be taught by Scripture. The devil will seek to wreak havoc on scrupulous consciences, and it'll rob us of our assurance. And again I would say, Luther was saying, "Melanchthon, sin boldly." He wasn't really telling him to sin; it was that he didn't really believe it was sin. It was just an over-scrupulous conscience, and, in other words, "burst out of it."

Another area of attack is not just that we fall into sin, this is probably even a bigger one: We fall into the same sin. That becomes hard because it's like, Scripture says that if we're practicing unrighteousness, I mean, basically, 1st John says that if we continue in sin, it's emphasizing we're not born of God. And what the devil will tell you is, "Scripture says that if you're in Christ, sin will no longer have dominion." And what he'll come in and tell you is this, "You keep falling into that same sin over and over. You're practicing it, it's habitual, you can't be real." But see, here's the thing: again, you have to remember this, we are radically new people. And I know this about the true Christian, they hunger and thirst after

righteousness. Do you desire that? I mean, answer me. If we could chop off your left hand right now, and you'd be perfect and never sin again, how many of you would be ready to do it? I'd put my hand up there right now, if chopping it off was gonna make me perfect the rest of my life. I'd say, "Take it, I want to be perfect." You know, if you're honest with yourself, whether you really desire the world, you desire all the things of the flesh, you desire the things that this world has to offer. You know if the only reason you want heaven is to escape hell, or whether you desperately want to be with Christ.

But I'll tell you this, you come to Scripture, and you know what I find? I find that the unbelief of the apostles in the four gospels, it was repeated. Jesus came to them and rebuked them for the same thing, over and over. But you see, the devil's crafty. He'll say, "Well, that was before Pentecost. After that, and you're after that, so..." Okay. Well, let's go after that. I remember preaching through those seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. I was blown away. I was blown away, especially by churches like Sardis: "You have a name that you are alive, and you are dead." And yet, there's Jesus saying, "Put away that false hope. Repent. You come to Me." And His arms are open. I look at Laodicea. Listen, if you have a name that you're alive but you're dead, how long were they living in that? How long were they doing that? Was that a one-time sin, a two-time sin, a three-time sin, a five-time sin, a ten-time sin? They had gotten to the place where the very name that they claimed to be was a lie. They were claiming to be alive, but they were dead.

Lukewarmness: How long did that go on at Laodicea? Ten days? It sounds like it was a chronic thing. And yet He says, "Repent." He says, "Those I love, I'm disciplining." How long had they been walking in not having their first love at Ephesus, before He stepped in and called them to repentance? How long do you think the Galatians had resorted to another gospel? One day, two days, three days, ten days? How long do you think that the Hebrews had been drifting away from Christ? A month? A year? How long do you think the Colossians had been living in carnality? What's my point? My point is this: those are obvious examples where people were not only living their lives and having fallen into some sin, some weakness, some terrible distortion, some lukewarmness, some loss of first love, some hypocrisy, some carnality that was obvious; some drifting from Christ that obviously was pronounced, it was repetitive, it was happening; and Christ steps in and calls them out of it.

Now listen, if with all the calls and all the scripture light, if a person turns their back to that, and keeps willfully going back to their sin; yes, obviously, you continue to do that because that's your heart's desire, you really don't hunger and thirst after righteousness, and you go back to that. I remember after first being saved, just being distressed because of certain sins that I was convicted about. And

I would draw the line in the sand, and it's like, "No more." And then I'd fail. And I remember the sorrow. But see, there was never sorrow when I was lost. Never. The only sorrow I ever experienced when I was lost is if I got caught, or there was some kind of negative ramifications for the sin that caused me earthly, worldly grief because of the embarrassment, or because of the cost, or because of something like that. There was never any inward sorrow because I had offended God. Never. Listen, the devil doesn't produce that, and the world doesn't produce that, and the flesh doesn't produce that. That comes from God's garden - a sorrow for sin. Not just the consequences of it, but a sorrow over it because we greatly hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now I'm going to quickly go on to the last one here because this is another one, and I experience this, and I know many people do. But, "the unpardonable sin." There's an area here, where, because of repetition, because of the amount of light, the devil will come in and say, "You've committed the unpardonable sin." I don't know if any of you have dealt with that. I've dealt with that. I know Bunyan dealt with that. I want you to open up to Mark 3. We got about 12 minutes till 9:30, and I'll just use this last little chunk of time to have us think about the unpardonable sin. Because again, when the devil comes to God's people, and says, "You've committed the unpardonable sin," the answer lies in Scripture, as to how to respond. And I think if we just look, Mark 3, listen to this. What Jesus is saying is, these guys are entirely against all reason and all logic.

Notice, Mark 3:22, "The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying that Christ is possessed by Beelzebul, and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.' And He called them to Him and said to them in parables..." Now, here, He is appealing to their logic. But you see, when people blow away logic, they don't want to hear it, because they are so against, such an antipathy for Christ, such a hatred for Christ. It's kind of like you hear in politics today. Nobody cares what the truth is. They've already got their minds made up. You see, that's what we're dealing with here. They've already got their minds made up, that Christ is to be rejected. This is arrogant, proud, vehement rejection against all the facts. They can look reason and logic in the face, and they're carried away by their hatred.

He said, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Very basic appeal. Well if you thought for a second, you'd say, "Oh yeah, he can't." I mean, maybe you'd figure out some way that he could. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man." See? It's all reason. It's all logical. "Then indeed he may plunder his house. Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven

the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'- for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'"

Look, the devil will be right there to say you've committed the unpardonable sin because some thought flashed through your mind. "I had some thought," you know. We've heard this. Somebody will make a vow and break the vow. Or they'll say, "If I think a certain thing, then I'm selling my soul to the devil." People will go through the craziest things. You have to recognize what's happening here. These guys, they're arrogant, they're proud, and they're rejecting; and it doesn't matter what reason Jesus brings, what logic He brings, they say, "No. It's of the devil." They can have the brightest light shined right in their face - Jesus doing these miracles and casting out these demons - and they say, "We will NOT believe!" That's different than the person who falls or the person who has a thought shoot through their mind. Entirely different.

Luke 11: 19-20, that's cross-reference to this, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul," again he appeals to this logic and reason, "by whom do your son's cast them out?" Well, see, the people in their generation, they considered if they cast a demon out, they did it by God. When they say "sons," they don't mean necessarily their biological kid that's running around at home. It's just like, you guys do this; people of the Jewish religion do this; people in your midst do this; your disciples do this. "Who do you guys say they cast out demons by?" "Well, we think that's of God." "Uh, okay, and you watch Me cast a demon out, and you're going to come to the opposite conclusion?" Again, it's the appeal to logic and reason. It's against all reason and logic. What you have to see about these guys is, they are completely denying Christ. They hate Him. They're denying the Christian faith. They're ridiculing the Spirit. They're not just a man who falls into sin. They are proud, they're arrogant, they are defiant. And listen, you get this sense of arrogance and defiance in the text in Hebrews, that seemed to deal with this as well.

Hebrews 6:4-6, "It is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt." Again, is this a person who had a stray thought, or thought a blasphemous thought about the Holy Spirit, or fell into the same kind of sin repeatedly? It says this is a person who's been exposed to amazing light, and they fell away. "What do you mean they fell away?" They went away from the Christian faith. They turned their back on the realities of the faith itself. That's like the sin that is unto death in 1st John 5. You say, "What's that sin?" Well, listen, if you let

1st John speak, what is it in John that is a sin unto death? says, "They went out from us because they weren't of us." Again, that's the falling away. They went out from us.

Listen, if a person falls into sin, where it's like, "No, I'm turning my back on the whole thing." You close the Bible. "I'm not reading that anymore. I'm going back. I'm going back to the way it was." With the Jews: "I'm going back to my old religion. I'm turning my back on Christ. I'm going back to the Judaistic deal here, that my forefathers have known. I'm done with this. I'm out of here." This is the sin unto death. They went out from us. They went out. They left the church. They turned their back. This isn't a person who stumbled. But you see, the devil's right there to say that. The devil is right there to say to people who are trusting Christ, "Well, look, you had that thought." Or, "You fell into this sin too many times. You've committed the unpardonable sin. You've had so much light, and you did that?" But you have to see, this is aggravated.

Or you go to Hebrews 10:26, "If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled under foot the Son of God?" See, it is a trampling. It's like, "No!" It's like, "Yes, I'll walk on that. I'm out of here. I've heard the truth and you know what? I would really rather have my other religion, or I'd really rather have my other sin, and I'm out of here. I'm turning my back on it. I'm falling away. I'm trampling on this blood of Christ. I'm profaning the blood of the Covenant." It's outraging the Spirit of grace. It's like you come face to face with this, and there's defiance. "I'm out of here. I'm going away. I don't believe this. I think this is all a crock. I want my sin. I want whatever..." They went away. They go back. They bailed out. They're gone. They've turned their back to Christ.

I mean, we've seen this happen, where somebody's like, "Yes, I've come face-to-face with the truth, and the reality is, "I want my homosexuality. I'm out of here." And they're gone. Or there's people who go back to the old lifestyle. "This is just... I'm gone." But there's a defiance there. I remember when I was first saved. It was like I had this mindset that if I thought this thought, like if I had a bad thought about the Holy Spirit... And I remember being in my apartment, on my knees, with my head against the wall, holding my ears, because I didn't want to think this thought. And it was like I was being bombarded by this thought, and I didn't want to think this thought, and then I thought it. And then the devil is right there to say, "Ahhh! You committed it. Now you're hopeless. Now you're miserable. Now you can't be saved." And it's like, "Aah!"

But thankfully, the Lord was much more powerfully working in my life than that. Again, where do you go? Back to the cross. Back to the doctrine of justification by faith, that He saves sinners. And I found greater hope in that, than misery in what the devil was telling me. That's where the peace and rest are gonna be found - going back to the cross, keeping our eyes on Christ, resting and trusting; coming with our sins, even if they're repetitive, and confessing them. And Scripture says He's faithful and just. You see, we got to take Him on those promises. It doesn't matter as a Christian how many times you fall. Those promises are true, that if you will go to Him, He's faithful and just to forgive you your sins. The blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all that. And we have an Advocate.

Listen, no matter how many times you sin, Jesus still says, "Come unto Me, I won't cast you out." No matter what you've done, if you go to Him He won't cast you out, because that promise is always good no matter what else is true. It is. There's no other promise that undoes that promise, that if you go to Him you'll find rest; if you go to Him He won't cast you out; if you go to Him His blood will cleanse. Those promises are true all the time. That's the heart and soul of our salvation. Don't let the devil rob you of those promises. Those need to be in your mind. "No matter what he's saying to me, if I go to Christ, I know He will not cast me out." And if He's willing to say to a church at Sardis, "Look, you've been living this lie. You have a name, and the whole thing is false. Just repent. Repent." I mean, it's amazing how longsuffering He is.

Father, I pray that you'd very much encourage our assurance. Help us to ward off the stratagems of the devil. We pray that you'd equip us with truth. And we ask for it all in Christ's name. Amen.