

“Satan’s Hindrance”
1 Thessalonians 2:17-18
(Preached at Trinity, June 23, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 14-16** Paul described the fierce opposition Christians have faced from the beginning. Paul declared that this opposition was experience by all the churches and that those who opposed the Gospel were both Jew and Gentile, describing the universal opposition to the Gospel.
2. Paul described the Jewish opposition that had been on display from the beginning as they opposed God and His redemptive purpose. They killed the prophets and ultimately killed the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Now as we continue with **Verse 17** Paul uses the context of this opposition as he continues his defense of his ministry. Remember, there were some opposing Paul and making false accusations against him. The opponents of the Gospel knew that if they could convince people that Paul was a false teacher unworthy of receiving, they could discredit the Gospel.
4. Paul has been defending his message as well as his credibility. Some were accusing Paul of using the Thessalonians for his own profit, that he didn’t really care for them, that his sudden departure proved his lack of concern for them. Paul is arguing that he had behaved sacrificially before them, taking nothing from them, and demonstrating his great love for them. Like a good shepherd, Paul’s great desire was to see them face to face so that he could continue to teach them. But he had been hindered by the fierceness of the opposition.
5. The phrase, “having been taken away from you” is a strong participle. Literally, it refers to being made and orphan. In other words, it was a forced separation. The ESV translates it, “since we were torn away from you.”
6. Then in **Verse 18** Paul unveils the true source of the opposition—by name.
1 Thessalonians 2:18 NAU - "and yet Satan hindered us"
The Christian church was facing severe opposition. Paul declares that the ultimate enemy of the Gospel was Satan. The human enemies were merely pawns of this arch enemy.
7. This is a profound statement, and one which is completely foreign to the modern ear; that there is a being working in the background, opposing the people of God. It seems so primitive, something that foolish superstitious men might believe, but no one today would believe that there is actually an invisible being known as the devil.
8. But this is exactly what Paul is declaring. Paul was not a naïve, simplistic fool. He was a brilliant theologian. He had studied under the great minds of his day. And we must not dismiss that these are not merely the words of Paul. This is the Word of God. And God is telling us that the ultimate force behind the fierce opposition to the Gospel is Satan. Satan has been behind the terrible persecution experienced by the church.

9. As I stated last week, this great conflict was foretold in the Garden immediately after the fall.
Genesis 3:15 NAU - "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."
10. Martin Luther understood our conflict with Satan.
 He said,
 "If you don't believe in the Devil, it's because you've never tried to resist him."¹
 He penned our great hymn:
*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
 We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;
 The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
 His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
 One little word shall fell him.*
11. Paul doesn't give us details as to exactly how Satan was hindering the progress of the Gospel. This we know. Paul wasn't merely speaking figuratively. He knew Satan as a literal being who is the enemy of God and His people. Paul reminded the Corinthians that we are not ignorant of his schemes.
2 Corinthians 2:11 NAU - "so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."
12. Without giving details, Paul is stressing that Satan was hindering his work. He was hindering the progress of the Gospel.
 This morning, I want us to consider Paul's words in **Verse 18**
- I. In terms of our spiritual battle, our war is not ultimately against other people. Paul says our ultimate battle is with Satan.
Ephesians 6:10-12 NAU- "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."
 A. This is not diminishing our physical struggles
 1. We certainly struggle with our own flesh.
 a. We often hinder the Gospel by our own actions. When our lives are inconsistent with the grace of the Gospel our message is hindered
 b. We also hinder the Gospel by our failure to seize the opportunities placed before us.
 b. We DO wrestle with our flesh and we must battle to keep it under subjection.
1 Corinthians 9:27 NAU- "but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

¹ Gary W. Demarest and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *1, 2 Thessalonians / 1, 2 Timothy / Titus*, The Preacher's Commentary Series, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1984), 32:64.

2. And we surely face severe hostility from lost humanity who hate God and His Kingdom. Paul faced beatings and vicious attacks, and they came from the hands of people.
- B. Paul is declaring that ultimately it is Satan behind the opposition to the Gospel.
1. Paul refers to Satan as the “god of this world” who blinds the people of this world.
2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
 - a. The people of this world reflect Satanic values
 - b. Jesus brought this accusation against Peter when He told him, “Get the behind Me, Satan.”
Mark 8:33 NAU - "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."
 2. Paul is reminding us that there is more than what can be seen with the eye
 - a. There is a real, personal being who is our enemy.
 - b. It may appear that people are the main hindrance to the Gospel—the hardness of their heart, and their open opposition.
Paul is saying that there is a nefarious fiend working in the shadows.
It was actually Satan stirring up the opposition.
1 Thessalonians 2:18 NAU- "For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us."
c. Calvin wrote: “When our endeavours are directed to the work of the Lord, it is certain that everything that hinders proceeds from Satan; and would to God that this sentiment were deeply impressed upon the minds of all pious persons—that Satan is continually contriving, by every means, and in what way he may hinder or obstruct the edification of the Church! We would assuredly be more careful to resist him; we would take more care to maintain sound doctrine, of which that enemy strives so keenly to deprive us. We would also, whenever the course of the gospel is retarded, know whence the hinderance comes.” ²
 3. The same can be said of those who preach false doctrine. By their words they greatly pervert and hinder the Gospel, but they aren’t the ultimate source. Paul described the true nature of false teachers
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

² Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol 21*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003). Page 263.

- a. This doesn't mean the false teachers are conscious that they are following Satan. Most false teachers sincerely believe that their teaching is sound. They don't see themselves as hindering the Gospel.
 - b. I'm sure Rob Bell's declaration that a loving God could never send a person to hell is made with the best of intentions.³
 - c. Surely, when Joel Osteen makes the claim that God wants you to have your best life now he has good intentions. But it isn't the Gospel. It isn't Christianity. He is actually hindering the Gospel. Greg Gilbert writes on the Nine Marks website: "Osteen's God is little more than the mechanism that gives the power to positive thinking. There is no cross. There is no sin. There is no redemption or salvation or eternity."⁴
 - d. What is the ultimate source of this false teaching that is hindering the Gospel? Paul says Satan is the ultimate source.
4. Martyn Lloyd-Jones – "We are citizens of the Kingdom of God, but the Bible tells us that we are opposed by another kingdom, which is also a spiritual kingdom, and that all along we are being attacked and besieged."⁵

II. How does Satan work against us?

A. We are in a spiritual war

1. There are spiritual realities that are difficult to explain. The Bible tells us that Satan is attacking us as Christians. And he is working in the hearts of unbelievers. He is shaping the mindset of this world.
2. This is one of the purposes of pastors—to protect the church from the lying schemes of Satan that hinder the work of the Kingdom.
Ephesians 4:14 NAU - "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming"
3. Satan works on the level of our mind. He brings thoughts into our mind. Calvin – "Satan opposes the truth of God with falsehoods, he obscures the light with darkness, he entangles men's minds in errors, he stirs up hatred, he kindles contentions and combats, everything to the end that he might overturn God's Kingdom and plunge men with himself into eternal death."⁶

³ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011).

⁴ Nine Marks: <https://www.9marks.org/review/your-best-life-now-joel-osteen/>

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cures*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965) Page 51.

⁶ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol.1, Book 4:15*, Edited by John T. McNeill, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Page 174.

- B. Satan is a master of deception
1. **Ephesians 6:11 NAU**- " Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."
 - a. Schemes - μεθοδεία – trickery, deceit
 - b. Satan can be very cunning in his opposition to the Gospel. The agents of his hindrance are convinced they are doing the right thing.
 2. Satan can even use Christians to hinder the Kingdom. He can use you to discourage and hinder others and you'll be completely unaware you are being used. Peter was one of the apostles and yet Jesus told him, "Get behind me Satan"
 3. We can be guilty of using harsh and unkind words and gossip that will tear down and hinder the work of the kingdom.
Jesus told Peter that he was actually being used of Satan to make His work more difficult.
Matthew 16:23 NAU - "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."
 - a. Peter was being a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον)
 - b. Satan is involved in most church problems
 - c. We can gossip, hold grudges, sow seeds of discord – and thus greatly hinder the progress of the Gospel.
 4. Satan enflames our pride and turns our attention upon ourselves.
James 4:6-7 NAS - "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."
 - a. The problem with pride is it makes us think too highly of ourselves.
 - b. Is there ever a time in your whole life that you ever considered that you were being used as a tool of Satan.
It is far more likely you've thought other people were being used.
 - c. We can cause strife with one another and think we are right.

Conclusion:

1. We are in a great spiritual war. Satan assaults us and hinders our work—but his face is often the face of a man.
2. We must never forget, however, that God governs this world. Satan is on a leash and under God's divine authority.
William Hendriksen – "Even when the devil tries to *chop up* the road that lies ahead, thus apparently blocking our advance, God's hidden plan is never wrecked. Satan may *cut in on* us, preventing us from doing what, for the moment, seems best *to us*, God's ways are always better than ours."⁷
3. May God keep us fighting the good fight of faith, waring against our arch enemy.
*The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:76.