

“The Tempter’s Snare”  
1 Thessalonians 3:5  
(Preached at Trinity, August 4, 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. Paul knew the Thessalonians were under great pressure from their neighbors who hated the Gospel. Just as Paul had suffered from their vicious hatred, these newly converted Christians were also suffering.  
**1 Thessalonians 2:14 NAU** - "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews"
2. Paul knew it was happening, but how were they holding up? Were they enduring well? Were they serving Christ in the purity of the Gospel, reflecting a Biblical worldview in a world in rebellion against God?  
Paul described this steadfast life in his letter to the Philippians.  
**Philippians 2:15-16 NAU** - "so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast the word of life"
3. Paul knew there was another element in this struggle. The people of this world are being influenced by an unseen enemy. He is cunning and deceitful and has one single goal—to lead human being in rebellion against God. His hatred of God is insatiable. His schemes in tempting men to sin usually go unnoticed. Most people blindly follow his nefarious suggestions.
4. Paul refers to him as the “tempter” in **Verse 5**—literally, “the tempting one.” Christians are continually being tempted with Satan’s lies and deceit. He tries to convince us that sin is a better option than obedience. He twists Scripture and presents a worldview that may seem good but it is full of lies.
5. Paul is telling us that Satan’s lies are so dangerous that some are led to abandon the faith. The true believer cannot be led to abandon Christ. But endless professors of Christianity have continued for a season only to be led away by the lies of Satan.  
**Matthew 24:24 NAU** - "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."  
**1 Timothy 6:10 NAU** - "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
6. Paul knew these new Thessalonian believers had a target on them. They were under attack by Satan. The grammar implies that it had already occurred. It’s always happening. Satan is relentless. He never sleeps. He never tires. He is focused with a single goal—to destroy you.

Richard Phillips – “When it comes to persecution, Satan desires to tempt new converts into unbelief. In the case of those who were never truly saved, Satan succeeds in thwarting the work of the gospel, so that it seems—this was Paul’s concern—that “our labor would be in vain” (3:5). In the case of the elect, whose salvation Satan cannot stop, he tempts them through trials into a weak and unfruitful faith that complains against the Lord instead of praising him with thanksgiving.”<sup>1</sup>

7. Paul refers to Satan’s temptations as snares to seize and entrap us.

**2 Timothy 2:24-3:1 NAU** - "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. "

I. What are some of Satan’s snares? What are some of his ways of temptation?

A. Satan seeks to destroy our holy lives. He seeks to draw us away from Christ.

1. He tempts us to sin.
2. Satan’s plan is to take all that God has created good and corrupt it. God is light and everything about Satan is darkness. In the Garden Satan labored to turn the heart of man away from God and he succeeded. Adam rebelled against God. Satan holds this world in darkness.
3. When God saves His people they begin to display the light of His countenance. Satan despises this.
4. The Thessalonians were surrounded by paganism that was forcefully imposing itself. How difficult it is to stand against such pressure.
5. Satan tempts us to make small concessions, minor acts of compromise—he makes them seem wise.

B. Satan sows seeds of doubt and fear

1. As these new Christian suffered under the persecution of their day Satan continually whispered, “Is Christianity worth what you are suffering?” “How do you even know Christianity is true?”
2. What new conflict would they face next? Ridicule? False slander?
3. Then, in the midst of their doubts Satan tempts them to sin and then accuses them of it.
4. God tells us, “Do not be afraid.”  
**2 Timothy 1:7 KJV** - "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."  
**1 Peter 3:12-14 NAS** - "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." <sup>13</sup> And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,"

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 91.

- C. Satan puffs us up with pride and self-importance
1. This is Satan's chief characteristic. In his pride he rebelled against God. In his pride he tries to usurp the work of God.
  2. The word for "disturbed" in **Verse 3** is a hapax legomina – only found here. It is difficult to translate and define. Some believe it means "to flatter" or "puff up." Were there some trying to flatter the Thessalonians into abandoning the faith. "You don't need this. You are better than this."
  3. Satan seeks to puff us up with pride.  
This is the danger of ordaining a new convert to the pastorate.  
**1 Timothy 3:6-7 NAU** - "not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. <sup>7</sup> And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."
  4. God resists those who bear the image of Satan's pride  
**1 Peter 5:5 NAU** - "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."  
James implies that Satan is often the source of our pride  
**James 4:6-7 NAS** - "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."
  5. This is the nature of gossip. It is interesting when Paul describes the deacon's wives the word he uses to describe gossip is διάβολος which is the Greek word for devil.  
This is because Satan is a prideful slanderer.  
**1 Timothy 3:11 NAU** - "Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things."  
He uses the word again in **2 Timothy 3**  
**2 Timothy 3:1-3 NAU** - "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,"
- D. Satan spreads lies and false doctrine
1. Paul's adversaries were accusing him of bringing false doctrine.  
**1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 NAU** - "For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; <sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts."
  2. This is Satan's way. He raises up men to spread lies.  
He raises up men to teach lies  
**2 Corinthians 11:13-14 NAU** - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

3. 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.”<sup>2</sup>
  4. How could the Thessalonians know what to believe? Timothy arrived to strengthen their faith with the sound words of Scripture.
- E. Satan sows seeds of discord
1. From the time Paul entered Thessalonica his enemies enflamed by Satan caused strife and confusion.  
**Acts 17:5-8 NAU** - "But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. <sup>6</sup> When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; <sup>7</sup> and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." <sup>8</sup> They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things."
  2. Satan continually seeks to divide the church. He seeks to sow discord among the brethren.  
 It is a terrible thing when Christians devour one another. This is a real problem in our generation. The internet has made it easy to attack other Christians as faceless objects.  
**Galatians 5:15 NAS** - "But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another."
  3. The church must always be on guard against sowers of discord  
**Titus 3:10 ESV** - "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him"
- II. What is our defense against so great an enemy?
- A. We must always remain alert against this foe  
**1 Thessalonians 5:6 NAU** - "so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."
1. Satan is always on the prowl. It demands that we stay vigilant  
**1 Peter 5:8-9 NAU** - "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

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<sup>2</sup> 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. We must maintain the Christian armor  
**Ephesians 6:10-13 NAU** - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> 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*. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."
1. Every good soldier must be adequately equipped
  2. John Calvin: "All that Scripture teaches concerning devils aims at arousing us to take precautions against their stratagems and contrivances, and also to make us equip ourselves with those weapons which are strong and powerful enough to vanquish those powerful foes. For when Satan is called the god and prince of this world, when he is spoken of as a strong armed man, the spirit who holds power over the air, a roaring lion, these descriptions serve only to make us more cautious and watchful, and thus more prepared to take up the struggle."<sup>3</sup>
- C. We must remember that ultimately God is our defense against Satan
1. Paul is sending Timothy, but only God can be our sure defense against the temptations of Satan.  
**1 Corinthians 10:13-14 NAU** - "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."  
**2 Peter 2:7-9 NAU** - "*if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men <sup>8</sup> (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless deeds), <sup>9</sup> then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,"
  2. Our armor is called "the armor of God."
  3. John Calvin: "Since this military service ends only at death, let us urge ourselves to perseverance. Indeed, conscious of our weakness and ignorance, let us especially call upon God's help, relying upon Him alone in whatever attempt, since it is he alone who can supply us with counsel and strength, courage and armor."<sup>4</sup>
  4. This must continually drive us to prayer
    - a. Jesus warned Peter, James and John of the great spiritual dangers  
**Mark 14:38 NAU** - "Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol.1, Book 1:14*, Edited by John T. McNeill, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), Pages 172-173.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 174.

- b. Jesus taught this in the Lord's Prayer (masculine gender with article)  
**Matthew 6:13 KJV** – “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”
- c. We must never presume upon our own strength  
**1 Corinthians 10:12 NAU** - "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."  
Temptation can arise suddenly and unexpectedly  
We must admit in our hearts, “I am poor and weak.” “I am daily in danger of temptation.”  
**Hebrews 4:16 NAU** - "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

#### Conclusion:

1. Temptation comes upon every believer. Satan is continually seducing us to sin. Many fail to recognize temptation and fall into Satan's snare.
2. Do you recognize Satan's temptations? Are you fighting hard in the spiritual battle? The warfare is all around us. It will sometimes lead to opposition and persecution. Are you prepared to continue faithfully in the war?