

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTEEN)

“THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL” (PART 4)

EPHESIANS 6:10-12

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

In verse **11** of our text Paul writes, “*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*”

In our previous Lesson we considered three of the **methodeia**-the “wiles” or “schemes” of the devil. These were **accusation**, **affliction**, and **deception**. In this Lesson we will examine two other “wiles” or “schemes”-**hindering** and **perverting**.

Hindering

In **1 Thessalonians 2:17-18** the Apostle Paul writes the following to the believers in Thessalonica:

17 But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,

18 because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

In verse **18**, Paul informs the believers in Thessalonica that he had wanted to visit them, but that he had been hindered by Satan from doing so. He says that this had happened more than once. The word “*hindered*” is a translation of the Greek word **egkoptó**: (**eng-kop’-to**), which means, “to cut into, to impede one’s course by cutting off his way.” In classical Greek **egkopto** was a military term meaning to cut in on, throw obstacles in the way of, or cut up the road so that normal movement was impossible. The road was so cut into and broken up that travel was blocked.

John MacArthur explains that the Greek word **egkoptó** was, “a military term referring to digging a trench or breaking up a road. One of the countermeasures an ancient army would take against the opposition was to dig a massive trench that would prevent enemy troops from reaching its men. Another way to frustrate the enemy’s progress would be to tear up a brick or stone road so that he could not traverse it. Thus Paul depicted the powerful devil as supernaturally obstructing the apostle’s strong desire to revisit Thessalonica.”

In sum, **egkoptó** means to interfere with the activity, or progress of something, the word “*hindered*” stressing harmful and/or annoying delay or interference.

How exactly did the devil hinder Paul from visiting the believers in Thessalonica? In **Ephesians 2:2**, the devil is described as “*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*” In **John 8:44**, our Lord said to the Jewish religious leaders, “*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.*” It is possible therefore, that the devil worked in, or “energized” some of “*the sons of disobedience*” to carry out his desire to somehow impede Paul’s journey to Thessalonica. We cannot be certain as to how the devil hindered Paul from going, but what is beyond doubt is that he has the ability to hinder Christian’s from pursuing their godly desires.

Was the devil successful in overthrowing the work of God in this instance? Certainly not, for although he meant it for evil, God meant it for good. God used Paul’s delay to inspire him to write this precious letter to the Thessalonians, which was, no doubt, a tremendous blessing to them, and has been a tremendous blessing to unnumbered millions of believers up to the present time!

Every sincere believer has had the experience, over and over again, of being frustrated in his or her efforts to do something that he or she knew was the expressed will of God. We have met with opposition and we have been hindered in our endeavours, sometimes even by family members or other believers! That is Satanic hindrance, the psychological manipulation of minds to arouse opposition and plant obstacles in our path.

Charles Spurgeon wrote the following in his celebrated daily devotional, “**Morning and Evening:**”

“Since the first hour in which goodness came into conflict with evil, it has never ceased to be true in spiritual experience, that Satan hinders us. From all points of the compass, all along the line of battle, in the vanguard and in the rear, at the dawn of day and in the midnight hour, Satan hinders us. If we toil in the field, he seeks to break the

ploughshare; if we build the wall, he labours to cast down the stones; if we would serve God in suffering or in conflict-everywhere Satan hinders us. He hinders us when we are first coming to Jesus Christ. Fierce conflicts we had with Satan when we first looked to the cross and lived. Now that we are saved, he endeavours to hinder the completeness of our personal character....Satan is sure to hinder us when we are earnest in prayer. He checks our importunity, and weakens our faith in order that, if possible, we may miss the blessing. Nor is Satan less vigilant in obstructing Christian effort. There was never a revival of religion without a revival of his opposition. As soon as Ezra and Nehemiah begin to labour, Sanballat and Tobiah are stirred up to hinder them. What then? We are not alarmed because Satan hindereth us, for it is a proof that we are on the Lord's side, and are doing the Lord's work, and in his strength we shall win the victory, and triumph over our adversary."

Perverting

In **Acts 13** Luke furnishes us with an account of the beginning of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey. In verses **5-12**, we have a record of their ministry on the island of Cyprus:

5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

9 But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

10 and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

In verse **10**, Paul rebuked Elymas, the magician saying to him, *“You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”*

Paul refers to Elymas as, *“You son of the devil.”* His other name, Bar-Jesus, means “son of Jesus,” or “son of salvation,” but, as it relates to him, that name was as fraudulent as was his character. Instead of being the “son of Jesus,” or the “son of salvation,” he was in actuality, the “son of the devil.” To call a person, “son of” someone, or something, was a Hebrew idiomatic way of saying that the person had the characteristics of the one they were associated with. Elymas was behaving like the devil because he was the devil’s “son” and was being controlled by him. Like his “father,” Elymas was the *“enemy of all righteousness,”* and he was *“full of all deceit and villainy.”*

Paul asks Elymas the following question: *“will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”* The word “crooked” is a translation of the Greek word **diastrephó**: (**dee-as-tref’-o**), which means, “to distort, turn aside; to turn aside from the right path, to pervert, corrupt.” **Diastrephó** conveys the basic idea of twisting or

bending out of shape and was used in secular Greek in this literal sense to describe a piece of pottery that a careless craftsman had misshaped or that had somehow become distorted before being fired in the oven. The word is used metaphorically in the New Testament to mean “pervert,” or “distort.” The idea is to cause one to depart from an accepted standard of values, in this case, the pure, unadulterated truth of the Gospel, or “*the straight paths of the Lord?*”

Elymas was attempting to cause the proconsul, Sergius Paulus to turn away from the pure, unadulterated truth of the Gospel. Verse **8** informs us that he “*opposed*” Paul and Barnabas, “*seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*”

“*The straight paths of the Lord*” spoken of here are like a pathway to salvation in Christ, and an entrance into the presence of God the Father. According to **John 14:6**, Jesus is the **only** “way,” or “path” to the Father. In **Matthew 7:13-14** our Lord said:

13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Brothers and sisters, the “narrow gate” is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the only genuine way to the Father and eternal life, “*and those who find it are few.*” The “wide gate” is every other way to God, all of which are the ways to death, “*and those who enter by it are many.*”

The “*paths of the Lord*” are the “*straight*” ones that lead directly to Jesus Christ, as opposed to the crooked ways of human beings who seek to lead persons away from Christ. One of the most seductive and successful of all the diabolic schemes of the adversary is to pervert the Gospel through **legalism**.

Concerning the perversion of legalism, **Nicholas Batzig** makes the following comments:

"Legalism is, by definition, an attempt to add anything to the finished work of Christ. It is to trust in anything other than Christ and His finished work for one's standing before God. The New Testament refutation of legalism is primarily a response to perversions of the doctrine of justification by faith alone....

Those who have embraced this form of doctrinal legalism forbid what God has not forbidden and command what He has not commanded. They bind themselves and others to a standard of external holiness to which God has not bound us in His Word. This is one of the most prevalent and pernicious forms of legalism in the church today."

We will now look at four passages of Scripture which cast light on Paul's struggle to protect and/or deliver First-Century believers from the dangerous perversion of legalism. All the passages reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**.

2 Corinthians 11:1-5, 12-15

1 I wish that you would be patient with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are being patient with me!

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

3 But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough!

5 For I consider myself not at all inferior to those “super-apostles.”

12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may eliminate any opportunity for those who want a chance to be regarded as our equals in the things they boast about.

13 For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will correspond to their actions.

Galatians 3:1-5

1 You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified!

2 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?

3 Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?

4 Have you suffered so many things for nothing?—if indeed it was for nothing.

5 Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?

Galatians 5:1-8

1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.

2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all!

3 And I testify again to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

4 You who are trying to be declared righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace!

5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait expectantly for the hope of righteousness.

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight—the only thing that matters is faith working through love.

7 You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?

8 This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you!

Colossians 2:1-10, 20-23

1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for those who have not met me face to face.

2 My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 I say this so that no one will deceive you through arguments that sound reasonable.

5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

6 Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

7 rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

9 For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form,

10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

20 If you have died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world, why do you submit to them as though you lived in the world?

21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”

22 These are all destined to perish with use, founded as they are on human commands and teachings.

23 Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body—a wisdom with no true value—they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.

Let us consider verse **12** of **Acts** chapter **13**. Luke writes, “*Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*” What was it that caused the proconsul Sergius Paulus to be astonished? Was it the swiftness of the judgment that fell upon Elymas? No! He was “*astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*”

The phrase, “*was astonished*” is the translation of the Greek word, **ekpléssó**: (**ek-place’-so**) which literally means, “to strike out, expel by a blow, drive out or away.” Figuratively, the word means, “to strike one out of self-possession, to strike with panic, shock, astonish.” The idea is of causing a person to be filled with amazement to the point of being

overwhelmed and unable to fully grasp what is happening. The word is in the **present tense** indicating that Sergius Paulus continued to be amazed, not at Paul's miracle but at Paul's **teaching!**

What the proconsul Sergius Paulus believed was not the miracle, but the Gospel, which Luke had earlier referred in verse **7** as the "*Word of God,*" and in verse **8** as "*the faith.*" The supernatural blinding of Elymas was merely a confirmation of the Word of the Lord. It is critically important for us to understand that miracles were never intended to save people, because a person can only be saved by the Word of God. God may use miracles to gain a person's attention and interest, but it is the "seed" of the Gospel, the Word of God," which bears fruit when it falls into soil of the good heart (**Luke 8:15**).

What Sergius Paulus witnessed was a confrontation of light and darkness, of two invisible kingdoms clashing, with the kingdom of light defeating the kingdom of darkness. Sadly, in many churches today, the audience is more amazed at the supposed miracles than they are at the supernatural Word of God! What is not appreciated is that this is a reflection of the spiritual immaturity of the audience.

Brothers and sisters, do we really appreciate the truth that the Gospel we have believed and are now enjoying the benefits of, is the most miraculous, supernatural thing on the earth? We urgently need to lay hold of that truth, for it will fortify our hearts against the devils perversions.