

“We are not ignorant of his devices”

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“We are not ignorant of his devices.... lest satan should have an advantage of us” is a phrase the apostle Paul uses when writing his second letter to the church at Corinth, making it clear that he was a man who understood satan’s ways of trying to take advantage of the church of Jesus Christ.

The word advantage in the original Greek language means to want more or

to seek to get more, and comes from the word to covet. The word is

PLEONEKTEO, and PLEONEKTES is a covetous person. So we can understand that the devices of satan against the church of Jesus Christ are because he wants more of us; satan covets the church and the members, and each member in particular, because the church is not his by right, we belong to the Lord Jesus. The truth is we are very precious to the Lord Jesus. There was nothing satan could ever give to truly redeem us from our sin, so he can only covet that which he could never own and plans devices, or devious ways, to achieve his aim of having more of us. It was of course satan who tempted Eve in the beginning and thereby involved both Adam and Eve in sin, bringing about the need for us to be redeemed. Jesus tells us in John 10 that He is the Good Shepherd of the sheep who lays down His life for the sheep, but there is one who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs up another way, that person is a thief and a robber. Those who covet what they can’t have become thieves and robbers and devise ways of taking that which they cannot own by right or by work. I suggest the Lord Jesus was talking about satan as the thief and the robber in John chapter 10.

Isaiah 14 from verse 12, speaks of “Lucifer son of the morning”.. “who is fallen and cast down to the ground because he said in his heart”.. “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God I will be like the Most High”. This is satan coveting the place in heaven which was not his and, in truth, he could never have. He wanted to put himself in the position of the Creator who made him. We see it is all about “I”, there is self will and self purpose and self motivation in it all, and yet the Lord Jesus taught us to deny or disown ourselves. Jesus did that when he made Himself of no reputation and demonstrates a totally different way of life and operation from satan. Jesus’ life was a life of submission and obedience to His Father, rather than one of rebellion and idolatry. Of course satan was thrown out of heaven, “God casts down the proud in the imagination of their hearts”.

It is interesting that Paul writing to the Roman church in chapter 1 talks of humans worshipping the creation more than the creator, having changed the truth of God into a lie. Satan is the father of lies and when he works in human beings they do what he tried to do; that is, to put the created thing above the creator. Mankind becomes the top of everything and we get evolution rather than creation. Evolution then denies God and gives humans no eternal hope, which is the exact position

of satan too, as the everlasting fire is reserved for him and all his angels. Satan's wish has always been to push God out and the acceptance of evolution does just that, as it denies the creator.

So covetousness goes back before the creation of the world, where it was found in the heart of satan, who has always acted since that time with a greed and a desire for what he could not legitimately have; or at least to spoil what God has made for His own pleasure and deny the Lord the joy of His creation.

Let us contrast this with the Lord Jesus who we have already seen is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. The apostle Peter tells us "You were not redeemed with corruptible things..... but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and blemish". Paul tells us "You were bought with a price". So we can understand that a price was paid to redeem the church of Jesus Christ from its sin. It was a proper and full price and did not involve anything corruptible (something which would not last, and fade away), but with the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus' blood is not corruptible and therefore gives eternal life to as many as receive Him. The life is in the blood and Jesus' life was the life His Father had given Him and that life was in the shed blood. "Jesus paid the debt for me" is a line from a well known chorus and tells us of the cost to the Lord Jesus and the suffering He endured. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us".

Jesus talks in Luke 14 of taking up our cross and following Him, and then of the man who has to count the cost when building a tower - can he finish it? and then a king going to war - can he win?. Jesus himself clearly knew the cost of what He was involved in; the King of Kings was going to war on the earth for the souls of humans and to redeem His church. He knew He could win only if He paid the full price. Jesus did not make peace with the enemy. Jesus would never compromise with satan.

So we see the difference between the two kingdoms and can compare the works of the Lord Jesus and the works of satan, the former are honest and righteous, the others dishonest and unrighteous. That probably is the reason for the final commandment, "Thou shall not covet". God did not want His people, in fact anyone, to follow in the footsteps of satan and sin like he did. It

seems to many that "Thou shall not covet" is just the last commandment, tacked on the end of the other nine and not really so important. But it is important as often covetousness leads to murder, adultery and theft and is why the other commandments are broken. Cain coveted (desired wrongly) the place Abel had with God. Cain could have brought a better sacrifice but did not, so he killed his brother. King David coveted (desired wrongly) Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, and as a result this led him to adultery and eventually to conspiracy to murder. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump". Jesus himself says "If you look on a woman to lust (desire wrongly) after her you have already committed adultery in your heart". It is all about wanting that which you cannot have. Paul in Colossians chapter 3 says "Covetousness which is idolatry". He equates the last commandment with "You will have no other Gods before me". So coveting (desiring wrongly) puts the object of our desire above God in our lives, serving the ambition to have that thing, whatever it is, above our service of God. That is why this is all very serious as it affects our whole attitude to life and gets into what controls all our motives. Ephesians 2 tells us that "The prince of the power of the air is the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience..... in the lusts of the flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind". So we see how satan, the prince of the authority of the air, the spiritual

environment of the world, works in those who disobey God. He works through the desires of their flesh and mind. It is through what they want, what they wish for, what they covet. No wonder there is a commandment, "Thou shall not covet".

Paul the apostle was himself, so he tells us in Romans chapter 7, convicted of sin because the law said "Thou shall not covet". Paul kept the other commandments, which are summed up as "Love your neighbour as yourself"; he kept the ones related to physical actions but the one about attitude of heart, ambition and lust he could not cope with. "O wretched man that I am" was Paul's cry. He was just like satan, wanting that which he could not have and devising ways of getting those things for himself. It was the law of sin operating in him. No wonder when Paul found freedom through the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus he rejoiced. Paul's comment "This new law has made me free from the law of sin and death". "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord".

Jesus taught us to "ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". The whole principle is one of faith and love and of relationship with God. Don't devise ways of getting things yourself but come to God and ask Him, was the exhortation Jesus gave to His disciples. It was the principle on which Jesus' own life worked.

When Jesus fed the 5000, He looked up to heaven, there would have been an inward cry to His Father, a request, a prayer and the miracle took place. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, His comment was "Father I thank you that you have heard me, but I only say this for their sakes because I know you hear me always". Jesus wanted to teach and demonstrate to those who saw Lazarus 'raised from the dead' the principle of faith, through His relationship with His Father, in which Jesus operated in all the miracles He worked. "It is not me that does the works but my Father who is in me, He does the works". It is the only way to work. If people look for ways to achieve miracles without the right relationship with God, then they look for alternatives and rapidly fall into error. They will take on either human methods, counselling or psychology for example, or occult methods, Shamanism or visualisation are examples here. There are many who have done exactly that in recent years, usually because they covet the fame and fortune the miracles will bring and they soon fall into the hands of satan. That is why too often some of these 'famous men' commit uncleanness or become very rich. "The Son of man had nowhere to lay His head".

The root of sin in the beginning was "Has God said?", so ever since there is doubt about God in every human heart. Humans simply could not trust God, (read the history of Israel, God's chosen people) and therefore followed the desires of their own hearts. Humans have worked out a culture separate from God to fulfil those desires, to get what they want and/or need. There are so many different cultures in the world. Each nation and tribal group has its own culture, even each family will have its own micro-culture within the culture of their tribe. That culture is set by the patriarch (father figure) in the family, or sometimes by the matriarch (the mother figure). Of course Jesus' culture was set by His Father, "When you pray say, Our Father who is in Heaven". But all the cultures, unless of course the people have come to the Lord Jesus, will be designed to get status and wealth and position

without the provision of God. Jesus submitted Himself to God, “being obedient unto death, wherefore God has highly exalted Him.” Jesus’ position is entirely given of God. He taught “when you go to a feast take the lowest place..... the master of the feast will tell you to come up higher”.

Jesus, the second Adam, taught the way of faith. When He was asked by the disciples to teach them to pray, He starts “Our Father who is in heaven”. Jesus directs us to His Father and away from this world’s ways and its culture. The next phrase is “Hallowed be your name”. Worship here, not idolatry, God first, then “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. In heaven the culture is all about doing the will of God. Satan who tried to disrupt that has been cast out. On the earth the culture is to do things without God, to seek our own will and our own desires. No wonder Jesus teaches us to pray “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Lord Jesus, change our culture from the satan controlling one, through the desires of our own hearts, into a God controlled culture. Only when everything is in its right order after the beginning of the prayer are our needs asked about; “Give us this day our daily bread”. Then forgiveness is sought and so on. Finally we are taught “Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever, amen”. Here we have the total recognition of God as He truly is, at both the beginning and the end of the prayer, with all our requests in between, and no place for covetousness or idolatry. Jesus has total faith and confidence in His Father, giving His Father all the glory and not trying to take that glory for Himself, Satan had of course tried to take the glory for himself. What a difference between the two of them. It is like Cain and Abel again, one, the Lord Jesus with the better sacrifice. No wonder satan continually sought to destroy the Lord Jesus and now tries to do the same with the people of God. Saul was the same with David; the kingdom had passed to David on God’s decree, so Saul the covetous one, (“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft”, Samuel told Saul) tried to destroy the future king. Perhaps we now see what sin is like and why there is so much destruction and so much envy in the world.

James writes in chapter 4 of his letter that the reason we don’t receive when we ask is because we ask wrongly. “You want to consume it on your own lusts” says James, in other words you want it for yourselves, sin is working in you. Jesus told the Jews they were of their father the devil for his lusts or desires they would do. So even in Jewish society sin and selfishness were operating. The Jews were God’s people, with his law to follow, but they were fulfilling their own desires and purposes, and as their history shows, being disobedient to the commandments of God. If there were such happenings even among God’s people, it is inevitable that there will be such happenings in every society in the world, and this will be increasingly so where the word of God has never been heard and where for centuries culture has been devoid of any divine or Christian influence.

So all societies in the world are developed around ambition, lust, greed and covetousness and humans in those societies lust after things of the flesh, and with ambition seek to get what they don’t own by right or won’t earn by works. Whole cultures are devised to allow such behaviour and make it acceptable to people living in those societies. There is never any concept of sin and no

consciousness of going against the principles of God, but rather a pursuit of “What is best for me whatever the cost to anyone else”.

Paul in Romans 2: 14 and 15 talks of those who don't have the Judaic law but “Do by nature the things contained in the law..... are a law unto themselves”. “They show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean (the standard, the test) while accusing or else excusing one another”. In other words if those who do not have the Judaic law but have the principles of it written naturally in their hearts, when they do what they know to be right that excuses them. When they know what is right and don't do it, their own knowledge of what they should have done will accuse them that they have done wrong. That is how consciences work. The problem is that the more we go against our consciences, the harder our hearts become and consciences can become “burned with a hot instrument”; this takes all the sensitivity and feeling of right and wrong away and is why people can commit the most awful things and not even feel anything. Societies can have the most depraved behaviour within their culture without ever considering it wrong. Most people in the world know what is right and wrong to some extent and when they do wrong they will know it, but the more they do that wrong, the quieter the ‘little voice inside’ becomes, until it becomes silent altogether. The answer of course is to “Walk in the light as He is in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ God's son goes on keeping us clean from all sin.”

Jesus Christ, on the other hand, being a true man and a pure man did not seek His own will but the will of “Him who sent Him” There was no seeking of that which He could not have by right but a working for such things and a laying down of His life. His main desire was for His church, those who are the redeemed, and for those, as we have seen, Jesus paid the full price, but even then He asked His Father for the church. Jesus said “Of all that the Father has given me”, they were given on the basis of the price paid. Psalm 2 has the promise “Ask of me and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance.” That is exactly what Jesus did, so all His people are His by right.

It is really about ownership. Back in the Old Testament God gave the “promised land” to Abraham and his descendents. It was theirs by right and on coming out of Egypt they took that which belonged to them. That is why they were told to destroy all that may have had any claim to the land so they would not live together with the former inhabitants. That is why Christians are told to put off the old man, (Jesus died so that the old man might be destroyed), so that we should no longer serve sin. Destroy all that was from the old life, is the commandment, so that nothing from your old life, family culture, inheritance, heritage, traditions and so on, has any claim to you whatsoever.

So from that time onward there were, and still are to this day, constant battles for possession of the land of Israel. So many of the Israelites' neighbours wanted the land and to dwell in it. They wanted something that did not belong to them, - I wonder where that idea comes from? King David was therefore such a hero as he conquered all the surrounding enemies who had fought against the people of Israel. David then gave the kingdom at peace to Solomon, which means peaceable. David

and Solomon go together as types of the Lord Jesus. David illustrates the Lord Jesus fighting and bringing deliverance, Solomon demonstrates the Lord Jesus sitting on the throne where all is at rest and He reigns over everything.

Jesus Christ is the Lord: He has conquered all our enemies. All the handwritten ordinances, which are the authoritative judgements, against us have been taken out of the way. They are nailed to His cross. The debt has been paid. We belong to Jesus. Isaiah 40 has the word of God to Israel. "Your warfare (your fighting) has been accomplished" (finished). The battle is won. Jesus cried out "It is finished". Now He reigns as Lord of all and we are to live under that peaceable spiritual authority on the earth, ready for heaven. Hallelujah. But as we have seen that was the place for Israel when Solomon was on the throne but it all went wrong. It started by Solomon's lust after women; the love of many women turned his heart from the Lord. Solomon took what he wanted. The kingdom was divided after Solomon's death, as his heart had been divided during the end of his reign, and then there were battles, some defeats and some victories. There were times when the land of Israel was occupied, times when it was put to tribute, (that is, paying taxes to the ruling nation which had taken authority over the people). Eventually the nation went into exile and the land became the dwelling place of other nations. It just shows where sin can lead to. There were good kings and bad, those that trusted the Lord in various measures and those that did not. Some, like Ahab, worshipped Baal, rather than the living God, and many continued to commit idolatry through those years before the exile. Each king is described as to what happened during his reign. In Israel they had made, in the time of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, two golden calves, which we are told "Made Israel to sin". For many years even when there were good kings these calves still remained and sin continued, there were idols in the land. There was place for satan, for idolatry, within the nation and God saw it and made comment. God is always aware of anything we set up in our hearts which is against His will. There was the wonderful time with King Hezekiah when he had removed all the idols, everything was taken away that was an offence to the Lord. Of course the king of Assyria tried to come and take the land but failed as Hezekiah looked to the Lord alone. The comment of the king of Assyria was "you have destroyed all your idols, don't expect the Lord to deliver you." But that is exactly what God did as Hezekiah was cast on the Lord and within the land there were no idols, no place for the enemy spiritually and therefore no place for the enemy physically. In his weakness Hezekiah was made strong as his trust was in the Lord.

Jesus just before His death says "The prince of this world comes and has no place in me". Please note, Paul talks, as we have seen earlier, of the "prince of this world working in the children of disobedience." It is the same prince and yet Jesus says the prince has no place in Him. No place in the Lord Jesus to work, no place in his lusts or desires to cause Jesus to sin. What a wonderful position and yet satan had sought that all of Jesus' life through his many devices. That is highlighted in the three temptations which Jesus endured in the wilderness. Jesus was "Tempted in all points as we are and yet was without sin". The temptations were focussed at the same points of weakness in human flesh in the Lord Jesus as in us. The first was the lust of the flesh which was when he was hungry. Hunger is the strongest human instinct. Jesus' comment was, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (read Deuteronomy 8 for the

background). Jesus had learned discipline over His flesh. The second was to the lust of the eyes. "Look at the kingdoms of the world, desire them and I will give them to you, if you will worship me" satan said. Jesus' comment, "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve". Jesus realised that when you worship satan you serve him. When you take that which satan offers it means you will serve him. Paul writes "All things are lawful to me but all things are not expedient, I will not be brought under the power (authority) of anything". Paul was not ignorant of satan's devices. Thirdly, "Jump off the temple and God will rescue you", relates to the pride of life, you are someone special, God will save you whatever. It is about our ego. Jesus' comment, "Thou shall not tempt the Lord your God". I will not have you in between me and my Father, I am not interested, I have come to do His will. James tells us "Submit yourself to God and resist the devil and he will flee from you". Learn from the Lord Jesus in the way he dealt with the enemy.

So satan will try and tempt you as he did the Lord Jesus, in the same points, in the same weak areas, your flesh and desires, your desires and your ambitions, and your desires and your pride. The enemy will tempt you to have by other means that which is not yours by right, and to bring you out of the will of God. He will try and set up idols in your heart and find a place in you; an idol is something that you want more than the Lord or something you look to more than the Lord Jesus. It could be a possession, or your job, or family, your work, your wealth, your culture and your pride and position, your reputation within your society, even your ministry. Satan can be subtle, but Jesus has been there before and overcome in all these areas and can succour those who are tempted. Satan cannot make you do anything against your will once you belong to Jesus and are free of the power of sin (when the old man is destroyed), but he will try and persuade you to conform your will with his. "Be not conformed to this world." "Temptation is when we are drawn away by our own lusts and enticed." That is the temptation. There is a drawing and an enticement. One assumes the thought of a good meal would have been very attractive to the Lord Jesus after 40 days fasting, but that is only temptation; only when lust is conceived does it bring forth sin. Let Jesus succour you when you are enticed and drawn away, before the lust is conceived. For example, the thought of driving away in the smart car which you are tempted to steal and looking impressive to your friends might be enticing but only once you get in and take the car is the sin conceived. However it is not good to play in our minds with the thoughts and let our imagination run along with the ideas, as they may set up an idol in our heart and cause us to devise a way of getting a car sometime. That applies to all things we might be tempted to have by dishonest means. It may not happen at that moment but such thoughts could so occupy our minds with planning when we should be considering the will of God. "Make NO provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof". In other words don't feed your flesh, resist the temptation as soon as you are aware as to what is happening and keep resisting until the matter is totally resolved in your heart, mind and life.

The original comment about not being ignorant of his devices relates to forgiveness, or rather unforgiveness. Having something in your heart against someone else; it can be a root of bitterness. Then God cannot forgive us, not that He does not want to, but as long as we hold unforgiveness in our hearts we hold sin, and God cannot forgive us our sin until we let it go and confess it to Him. In that place of holding sin in our hearts, satan already has place in us, as sin is all the space he needs.

“When you stand praying, forgive”. If your brother has anything against you, - note, not you against him, - that should be forgiven as you stand praying, go to your brother and be reconciled before you bring your gift. No place for satan. Jesus was not ignorant of satan’s devices but how much unforgiveness is there among God’s people, how much place for the enemy? When the Lord looks He can still see the “things not pulled down” and it spoils the whole land. We are to be wholly His and belong in no part to anyone else. “We are bought with a price; glorify God in your body and your spirit which are God’s.”

Jesus in His death has made provision for us to live free from the devices of satan. “We are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power.” We need no one or nothing else. Please don’t be ignorant of satan’s many devices, don’t hold sin in your heart, don’t seek your will but God’s will, be forgiving to all, put God first in all things. “Make no provision for the flesh and give no place to the devil”. Let your behaviour be without covetousness, don’t seek or take anything that is not yours by right or you will do legitimate work to obtain. Don’t work to achieve something you should not have so as to rebel against the will of God. Do not manipulate your life and circumstances and other people to meet your own ends and ambition. “So run that you may obtain the prize,” “looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.”

“Be sober, be watchful, your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion seeking those whom he may eat up” We see therefore how satan is continually trying to take advantage of the members of the church of Jesus Christ as he covets that which is not his. He will endeavour to get us to be like him and covet things, rather than submit to the will of God and receive from the Lord the things which we need in our lives. Peter says “Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” In other words, you are not on your own and you are not unique; all the members suffer trials and temptations, but if we endure them as good soldiers of Jesus Christ we will be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you”

“Hear O Israel, you shall serve the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.” Have you heard? Does faith rise in your heart and cry ‘all for Jesus?’ You belong to Him. God bless you.

