

**Ephesians 6: 11; “Further Schemings of the Devil”, Sermon # 4 in
the series – “To Be Strong in the Lord”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on September 2nd, 2012,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

It is important to remember that we are here commanded to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Often, the reason that we become weak as Christians is not because the Lord has not given us grace, but because we do not apply ourselves, we do not engage ourselves, we do not exert ourselves spiritually. This we must learn to do if we would glorify God. In Romans Chapter 15, verse 30 Paul says, “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.” Our faith does not rest upon our own power, but in the power of God. Nevertheless the Apostle begs the brethren at Rome to strive together with Him, in their prayers to God for Him. And what he asks for is that he may be delivered from evil unbelieving men, and that his service of ministering a gift of money to the needy saints in Jerusalem would be acceptable since it was coming from the Gentiles. Paul wanted to come to them by the will of God and to be refreshed together with them. There is a time to strive congregationally, individually, and there are, in the will of God – times of refreshing. May it be so among us. May we know how to strive together and how to refresh one another in our service to Christ our King.

We have seen our need to put on the whole armor of God. We saw, in the last sermon that I preached to you, the reason that we needed to put it on was in order to stand against the Devil’s wiles. We looked at the main methods that he uses to deceive and draw Christ’s soldiers into sin. He presents temptations at the most opportune time. He orders his temptations in subtlety, and he chooses fitting instruments for carrying out his designs – usually it is men who want power, who cause division, and who would turn others away from the truth. This afternoon we will look at Satan’s 2nd great design which is to accuse, vex, and trouble the saint. He not only wants to tempt, he also wants to trouble us. He wants to unsettle our faith and make us ineffective in the service of our Lord. He has many schemes to accomplish this. We will look at 3 of them.

1st – The 1st Scheme Satan uses to trouble the saint with, is vexing their minds with doubts about their salvation.

We are speaking here about the thoughts of a godly person being troubled. We know that the thoughts of an unbeliever, a wicked person, are going to be tossed and troubled because their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. (Isaiah 59: 7) Isaiah 57: 20 says “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose

waters cast up mire and dirt.” “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.” But to the one believing in Jesus, He creates peace, peace for him who is far off and to him who is near. The true Christian has peace with God, and the peace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet there are times when he is very troubled and vexed in his soul by very sinful, unbelieving and perhaps even blasphemous thoughts. And he reasons to himself: How can I be a true Christian and have such thoughts? And he is in agony over this. We must understand that Satan can, at times, get permission from God to trouble the Christian and vex him and tempt him to sin. He put it into Judas’ heart to betray Christ. He put it into Peter’s mind that Jesus should not go to the cross.. He probably put it into Job’s wife’s mind to say to Job, “Curse God and die”. And he may put it into the true Christian’s mind that he cannot possibly be a Christian because he experiences these evil thoughts running through his mind.

What should be done then? I think that we need to turn to Zechariah 3: 1-5. “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.” “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan!’” “The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!” “Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.” “Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’” “And to him He said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.’” “And I said, ‘let them put a clean turban on his head.’” “So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him.” “And the Angel of the Lord stood by.” When you come to Jesus Christ and ask Him to save you, you must realize that Satan will accuse you; he will oppose you. He will bring up to you, and he will bring up to the Lord, all of your grievous sins, the sins of youth, the sins of your flesh, and your neglects in being wholly devoted to God.” You notice Joshua doesn’t have anything to say for himself. He has simply come to God for salvation and help. But the Lord has a lot to say to Satan in regard to these accusations, and the present condition Joshua is in. Joshua is clothed in filthy garments – a picture of his sin. No doubt the perfect picture of a man coming out of the captivity due to the nation’s sin and his sin. No doubt he was deeply troubled by Satan’s accusations, and those of his own heart. No doubt he felt the filthiness and vileness of his heart. The man who is best acquainted with his own heart feels and owns his own sin most deeply. But Satan would keep him in that situation indefinitely if he can. Because he knows that that man will be troubled and vexed; he will lack assurance and he will be unable to serve the Lord with gladness and confidence unless his clothing is changed. Nothing can be worse than a minister in filthy garments.

But what about you? Do you lack confidence? Are you troubled and vexed by your own thoughts of your sinfulness? Are you unsure whether you can call yourself a Christian, or whether you can ever be useful in service to Him? Then

see what the Lord Himself will do for you. The Lord Jesus (for that is Who the Angel of Jehovah is) will Himself ask the Father who has chosen His people, to rebuke Satan. He will know how to ask all the right questions of Satan. As your Advocate, Jesus will say to him, "Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" The Lord Jesus is saying this to him; "I know all the sinful influences of Babylon as well as the corruptions of Joshua's own heart make him look bad, and you, Satan, would make him look worse; but consider, I am bringing him out of all of that, to serve Me." "I am going to take away the filthy garments of sin and clothe him with rich robes and a clean turban." "I will clothe him with all the garments of salvation. He will serve Me despite all of your wicked accusations." This, in picture form, is what goes on in the life of a godly person, behind the scenes, day by day. Jesus is our Advocate with the Father. Jesus is interceding on our behalf. And the Spirit also is interceding for us taking up our groanings that cannot be uttered or expressed and bringing them to our Savior, and our Father. This does not mean that we continue in sin that grace might abound. It does not mean that we do not engage in repentance of every known sin day by day. It does not mean that our intention is not to forsake besetting sins. But it does mean that both I and my Lord realize that there is a holy interaction that is taking place day by day, where if we are struggling with the sinful thoughts of our hearts, and are seeing ourselves as those who are not measuring up to God's holy standard of keeping all of His commandments perfectly, that we are not condemned, and that we are being forgiven and cleansed in our conscience from all sin. But you should also understand, that as time goes on, the Lord will build confidence of a holy kind into your life, so that as you take up the whole armor of God; he will defend you from all the accusations of the Evil One. The person who has already put on Christ and the garments of salvation will be given grace to gird on the armor of light and overcome the evil one, and stand in the evil day of spiritual battle.

2nd – A 2nd Scheme which Satan uses to trouble and vex the child of God, is to twist the saints view of God in times of testing.

Turn with me to the book of Job Chapter 2. We will read verses 1-9. "Again, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord." "And the Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?'" "So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.'" "Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" "And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without a cause." "So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Skin for skin!'" "Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life." "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.'" So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with

painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.” “And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes.” “Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity?’” “Curse God and die!” “And he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks.’” “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” We see here that Satan is a great intelligencer. He goes around to and fro on the earth, walking back and forth on it; he’s looking to see how he may promote his own kingdom of darkness and lies. Satan’s whole strategy with Job is to get him to curse God to His face. And so, in Chapter 1 we see him get permission from God to take away Job’s possessions, his business, and his children. In Chapter 2 he gets permission to take away his health. And although Job’s wife takes her cue from Satan to say to Job “Curse God and die”; Job admirably declines and comes forth with one of the most beautiful rejoinders in Christian history – “Shall we indeed accept good from the Lord and shall we not accept adversity?” Job, in faith, passed the test; did not sin with his lips, proving that he was a man who feared God and turned from evil. This is what all Christians ought to do when they are facing adversity from Satan. They ought to justify God in His Providential ordering of all things. They ought to accept adversity as well as good from the Lord, knowing that God is going to use it for His glory and even for the saint’s good.

But the real test for Job is yet to come. With everything of God’s blessing removed from Him, how does he now see God? God still continues to boast in him as a man holding fast his integrity, but God points out to Satan that he had incited God against him, to destroy him without a cause. The word in the original means that God had been stirred up by Satan; moved by Satan, to permit this testing of Job. But we should understand that God is not pleased with what Satan has done, even though he permitted this awful test for Job’s good. The reason God is not pleased is that Satan incited God against Job without a cause. And Satan’s answer in Chapter 2, verse 4, shows that he could twist Job’s answer of integrity to mean that Job was insensitive to his loss, and only concerned with preserving his own life. Actually Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and a murderer from the beginning. But Satan’s inciting of God against Job is what we need to focus on now. When the pressure is on, when the people you have previously known as friends, see you now as a sinner, even though you know in your heart that your integrity is intact, how do you see God? We must remember that although God permits and ordains evil for His people’s testing and their good, that He does not approve of it. He hates it. The question that we must then pose to ourselves is this: Do we desire not only to fear God and turn away from evil, but also to love God and justify Him in all that He brings into our lives? How do we view God when He takes things away from us, or even when he takes people away from us? It is very important to God, what we do in that situation. And it is even our righteous response to our calamity, that Satan wants to twist.

It was because God had allowed this trial and affliction to go on, after the initial loss of his possessions, his children, and his health, that Job thought God had become his enemy. But actually we know, who have read the story, that this was not the case. God is always at enmity with unrepentant sinners, but toward His people, who desire to hold fast their integrity and to pursue righteousness, they desire to know what their sin is, and to repent of it, to those people He bears quite a different attitude. Job was having a hard time seeing this, but God was still very much for him at his lowest point. And will you not, dear believer, remember this as well? God is for the one who is trusting in Him, even when they are at their lowest point, and Satan is continually trying to attack them and devour them like a lion.

Turn over with me to Job 36: 1-12. Elihu was a true friend to Job, even if his other three friends were not. Elihu saw what would give Job the right perspective on all that had happened to him. Job needed to justify God rather than himself in the midst of all of his afflictions. “Elihu also proceeded and said: ‘Bear with me a little, and I will show you that there are yet words to speak on God’s behalf.’ “I will fetch my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.” “For truly my words are not false; One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.” “Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding, He does not preserve the life of the wicked, but gives justice to the oppressed.” “He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they are on the throne with kings, for He has seated them forever, and they are exalted.” “And if they are bound in fetters, held in the cords of affliction, then He tells them their work and their transgressions—that they have acted defiantly.” “He also opens their ears to instruction, and commands that they turn from iniquity.” “If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.” Look at how Elihu cautions Job in verses 21-23. “Take heed, do not turn to iniquity, for you have chosen this rather than affliction.” In other words, learn to justify God rather than yourself, in all that you are going through. He continues in verse 22 – “Behold God is exalted by His power; who teaches like Him?” “Who has assigned Him His way, or who has said, ‘You have done wrong?’” “Remember to magnify His work of which men have sung.” You can see here, from this, that no matter how much Satan tries to destroy the life and the heart’s devotion of God’s dear child, that he cannot do it. God does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous. God will continue to look upon His people favorably and lovingly because of His Son Jesus Christ. Even if they are bound in the cords of affliction, he will show them His way and open their ears to instruction, to teach them His own way. He will faithfully do this in order that they may be forgiven all of their sins, and so that all of the accusations of Satan shall fall down into the pit of nothingness. As this is truth that God would have us to learn, let us now come humbly and bow before our God in prayer, receiving what dark and difficult things He permits in our lives, in the faith that He will hear us. Let us pray also that

Satan's schemes would be thwarted in each of our lives, and that together as a church we would be able to stand for truth in the evil day.