



Satan's Deadly Trap – Part 1
Various Scripture
GCSP – 09/19/2009

I struggled with the decision on this week's sermon. I struggled because I am 3-4 sermons away from completing the series on the Ten Commandments and God made it clear that I needed to preach on a different topic first. I bargained that maybe I could hurry it up a bit and finish the Ten Commandments in two sermons; but the more I tried to reason why I should finish what I started now instead of later, the stronger I felt the compulsion to go in a different direction.

I struggled also because this topic is not only a difficult one for me to study and hear but that it will most likely be one that is difficult for many if not all of you as well. It is one of those topics that some will be tempted to make application to others in the church without taking the time to apply it to their own life first. It is a topic that has the power to deceive us all when we are in the midst of it.

I am calling this Spirit-led diversion, "Satan's Deadly Trap" but I will be leaning heavily on the material contained in John Bevere's book, "The Bait of Satan."

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Luke**.

Luke 17:5

Let's pray.

The disciples had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle. They have seen lame men walk, blind men see, deaf men hear, dead men rise again, multitudes fed with a sack lunch, and demons cast out. They have heard unbelievable teaching and seen Jesus stand up against the Pharisees; sending them home speechless or grumbling to themselves.

But none of this is at the cause for them to cry out, "**Increase our faith!**" And the sense of this request is one of desperation. The disciples are at a loss as to how to accomplish something and they are very aware of the fact that without an increase of faith in great proportion they will fail miserably.

Back up a little in **Luke 17** and you will see what has alarmed the disciples so much.

Luke 17:3-4

Jesus tells them to confront their brothers and sisters in Christ, one-on-one, if they have sinned, and then He tells them to forgive them again and again and again when they sin against them. He even says if it happens seven times in a single day, forgive them seven times; and if it happens seven more times tomorrow and the next day and the next, forgive them tomorrow and the next day and the next. At this the disciples cry out to the Lord, "**Increase our faith!**"

I have taught the Biblical command of confronting each other one-on-one time and time again in the brief history of Grace Church and the topic of forgiveness has been taught

and preached on several occasions by myself and others, yet it is still something most recoil from. Most Christians have an overwhelming fear of confrontation. Most Christians would much rather allow the sin to continue or enlist someone else to take care of the issue rather than obey God's clear command.

I have been guilty of this sin and I believe it is safe to say that the rest of you have as well. But just because we are all in the same boat it doesn't make it any less of a sin.

In our weekly prayer meetings on Monday mornings I have been guilty of reporting to the other men that someone in the church has revealed something to me that needs to be dealt with. On several occasions the other men have done the same thing. "Someone came to me with having a problem about this or that and we need to straighten things out." The "someone" is always anonymous and we usually find a way to deal with the issue.

Here's the problem with this approach; God says one-on-one is His way of dealing with sin and offences, and when it is instead brought to the board it is now one-on-five, or one-on-ten if all of us reveal the goings on of our meetings to our wives. I don't see that approach anywhere in God's Word until all other attempts are exhausted according to **Matthew 18:15-18**. In that passage after the one-on-one has failed it is allowable for one or two others to be brought into the equation; and only after that attempt fails is the rest of the church membership brought in. And in **Galatians 6:1-5** it never goes beyond the one-on-one encounter.

God is so wise and perfect in His commands yet we still think our way is better. Can you see how small things get blown out of proportion when we choose our way over God's way? Can you see that God's design is for most issues and sins of offence to be handled between two people so that it doesn't have the opportunity to rile up anyone else in the church? Can you see the beauty of God's wisdom in maintaining unity? And can you see why most church-wide problems and church splits could be avoided if we simply obeyed God?

But we aren't done with why the disciples cried out to the Lord, "**Increase our faith!**" Back up two more verses in **Luke 17**.

Luke 17:1-2

As you know, I use the New American Standard Bible (NASB) for most of teaching and preaching. I do so because it is considered to be one of the most literally accurate English translations available on the market. And although there are others that are very good as well, my studies through the years have confirmed this. Unfortunately, in **Luke 17:1** the choice of words, although still accurate, is actually a little weaker than the original Greek is. The New King James Version (NKJV), another of the English translations that is extremely accurate, gets this verse a little better in my opinion: "**It is impossible that no offences should come.**"

Did you get that? It is impossible to avoid being offended! You simply have no option in this; you will be offended time and time again. And the words of the NASB help us see the danger by using "**stumbling blocks**" instead of "**offences**" because offences trip

us up. We stumble almost every time we are offended; and the first opportunity to stumble is to tell someone else instead of going to the offender as the Bible commands.

And let me ask you a question: What do you think Satan's goal is in bringing offences into your life? He wants to cause division in the church because he knows he has no power and no answer for the unity of the Holy Spirit. And he also wants you to get your focus off of God and onto yourself. As Joyce Meyer puts it, he wants you walking around saying, "What about me? What about me? What about me?"

It makes me sick when I catch myself acting in this way and it makes me sick when I see you doing it as well. It's not about me and it's not about you! We have fallen for the mantra of this world that we need to look out for number one; and the world doesn't view God as number one.

In Webster's Collegiate Dictionary there are 218 different entries that begin with self, and all but a handful are totally self-absorbed. We are being bombarded with the modern day psycho-babble that emphasizes self-esteem and self-worth and self-love, and beloved as good as it seems to sound it is straight out of the pits of hell.

We are deceiving ourselves and deceiving our children and grandchildren, and we are setting ourselves and them up to be offended at just about everything when we and they discover the harsh reality that the world does not revolve around us or them.

"It is impossible that no offences should come."

And here's the kicker: the vast majority of offences will come from those close to you.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the **Psalms**.

Psalm 55:12-14

David is lamenting the fact that the primary source of offences against him are coming from those he loves and those he has had sweet fellowship with.

Do you know why this is? - Because you have higher expectations from those you know and love. When President Obama does something else that offends me today and the next day and the next day, I get angry but I don't get shattered because my expectations for him are so very low. I have higher expectations for casual friends, even higher expectations for family and Christian brothers and sisters in this church, even higher expectations for my wife, and in most people's case, even higher expectations for their pastor.

The higher the expectations you have, the greater the opportunity for major offences to come into your life. President Obama could do the exact same thing to you that a brother or sister in Christ does to you and your capacity for offence will be vastly different; or God forbid I do something to offend you.

David affirms this truth in this Psalm we just looked at.

Now turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Matthew**.

Matthew 24:10-12

How many of you believe we are living in the last days? I won't take the time to prove this out but we could turn to any number of passages to show you that we are living in the last days. Whether that means days, months, years, or decades is not for us to speculate, but we are living in the last days according to Scripture.

Jesus says in this passage that in the last days many will fall away, or literally, many will stumble or be **offended**, as again the NKJV more accurately translates. But Jesus doesn't stop there; He instead shows us a progression that can come from being offended. Offence, if left unchecked will lead to betrayal; and betrayal, if left unchecked will lead to hatred.

Are you beginning to see the serious nature of offence? Do you now understand why God tells us on several occasions to nip it in the bud by approaching the one who has offended you one-on-one to get the matter straightened out immediately?

And let me say right now, if someone does approach you to deal with an offence, don't you go and get offended. Realize the anguish and the courage it took the other person to approach you and realize even more that they are trying their best to obey God. Both of you speak what needs to be spoken and both of pray together that God will be glorified when all is said and done.

Jesus goes on to say that false prophets will then arise to mislead many. This then leads to lawlessness and lawlessness leads to the love of many growing cold.

Now, the primary application of this passage has to do with the tribulation period but that is not the only application. We can apply this to our situations as well; and it starts with being offended.

Allow me to tie this in with the Psalm we just read. When Jesus says, "**most people's love will grow cold**", we need to understand who He is talking about here. The Greek word translated "**love**" in this verse is *agape*. Beloved, *agape* love is reserved only for those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The world cannot experience true *agape* love apart from the *agape* love of Christ living within them. *Agape* love only comes from God. The only love the world knows is either *phileo* (deep affection or brotherly love) or *eros* (erotic love) or a combination of the two.

So Jesus is saying that because of offences not properly handled according to God's Word, Christian's love for one another will grow cold.

Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. Most people who hop from church to church do so because they have been offended by some person or by the pastor. Now I am not telling you to stay in a church that teaches heresy but understand that the teachers and preachers in any church are never going to completely match up with how you interpret certain passages of Scripture.

Some of us were discussing retreats last week. It seemed as if each person viewed retreats differently than the next. Since we do not have a passage of Scripture outlining

what a retreat is supposed to look like, it didn't make one person right and the other wrong, it was just different views.

Unfortunately, different views can easily turn into offence if not approached and handled lovingly and unselfishly.

And this is a good place to mention this: There are two major categories of offence, those who have been treated unjustly and those who think they have been treated unjustly.

Bevere says, "People in the second category believe with all their hearts that they have been wronged. Often their conclusions are drawn from inaccurate information. Or their information is accurate but their conclusion is distorted. Either way, they hurt and their understanding is darkened. They judge by assumption, appearance, and hearsay."

I would add that assumptions are made about the other person's motives, and that person is judged according to these assumptions. And because the Biblical mandate of going to the one who has offended you is bypassed, those assumptions are cemented as fact in the offended person's mind.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **2 Timothy**.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

There it is. Satan's deadly trap, or as Bevere calls it, the bait of Satan, is offence. In the very first passage we looked at this evening, **Luke 17:1**, we saw Jesus say "**It is impossible that no offences should come.**" The Greek word translated offences, or stumbling blocks, is "*scandalon*." *Scandalon* literally means the bait of a trap. So every time you are offended, whether or not you have been treated unjustly or you only believe you have been treated unjustly, you have taken the bait and will now be trapped in Satan's snare.

And beloved, do you see what the last phrase in this passage says? You are not only in the devil's snare but you will also be held captive by him to do his will. Offence is a tool of Satan to bring you into his captivity!

Wow, wow, wow! But let's not stop there.

2 Timothy 3:1-2a

We have already affirmed that we are in the last days. According to this passage the very first proof is that **men will be lovers of self**. What about me? What about me? What about me?

For the umpteenth time, what is the opposite of love? – Selfishness. When you are in the midst of an offence are you generally acting in a loving way or a selfish way?

I know this is already a heavy load, at least it is for me, but allow me to add another brick or two. Many, if not most, of the offences in your life are hidden from you. We are all very aware of the ones that are plain enough for all to see, or the tele-offences, meaning telephone and tell-a-friend. But often our pride will hide or cloak some of the

offences in our life. We know we should be **patient when wronged** and that we **must not be quarrelsome**, so we put on a good front and may even verbally affirm that we were not offended by that.

Most of you know the story of what led to my resignation at the church I previously pastored. Almost immediately after that resignation we started Grace Church so I had to suck it up and get over all of the hurt of the multiple offences heaped on me. I was the one putting on that good front and affirming that I had forgiven all. But years later I found I was still defending myself whenever anything to do with that church was mentioned.

The offence was still there. I was still to some degree in Satan's captivity. And beloved, I will be so bold to admit to you that I don't know if I have completely escaped to this day. I'm still not very comfortable in the presence of the key players of that fiasco. I smile and I have pleasant conversations with them when we run into each other, but my thoughts immediately go back to the hurt and the pain every time I see them. I am not completely free from that offence!

The Bible says I have to repent, and I have to come to my senses and escape. Do you know why I am not completely free? – Because I choose to stay in the snare! According to the passage we are looking at here it is within my power and my control to escape. It is not within my power and my control for the offenders to repent and escape, but it is for me.

It's pride. It's always pride. When you are offended your pride will keep you from dealing with the truth. Your pride is going to distort your vision. Your pride says everything is just fine the way it is. Your pride hardens your heart and darkens your understanding. Your pride says you are the victim here and you are justified to feel the way you do by golly.

And your true condition is now hidden from you. Even though you may have unjustly been hurt and wronged, by not handling it the way God has commanded you to handle it, you are now the one in Satan's snare and you are the one taken captive to do his will. You are the one in sin's icy grip.

C.S. Lewis said, "There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people...ever imagine they are guilty of themselves. The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Un-chastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind...as long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."

And I would add that as long as you are looking down you have elevated yourself to God's position.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 11:2; 29:23

Don't let pride blind you to what needs to be done. Don't let pride dishonor you or drag you down.

Your true heart condition may be hidden from you but it is not hidden from God.

Let's look at one more before we close tonight. Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Revelation**.

Revelation 3:17-18

The people in the church at Laodicea were deceived. Their pride deceived them into believing that they were in great shape. They believed they were rich and in need of nothing. The truth of the matter is they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. You say, how could their self-assessment be that far off? How could they think they were wealthy and all was well when they were so messed up?

Pride is the answer. And the only cure is to admit you have a problem, allow yourself to be refined by the fire of the trials you face, and ask God to open your eyes to the true nature of your heart. And when God answers that plea you will fall to your knees in repentance. You will begin to see how often you go around picking specks out of the eyes of your brothers and sisters when you have a log impaled in your own eye.

John Bevere says, *"It doesn't matter how up-to-date you are in new revelations from the many seminars and Bible schools you've attended or how many books you've read or even how many hours you pray and study. If you are offended, and in unforgiveness, and refuse to repent of this sin, you have not come to the knowledge of the truth. You are deceived, and you are confusing others with your hypocritical lifestyle."*

Let's pray.

Jesus says, **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"** (**Matthew 5:44**).

Paul says, **"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourself"** (**Philippians 2:3**).

And Solomon says, **"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle"** (**Proverbs 18:19**).