



Satan's Deadly Trap – Part 12
Various Scripture
GCSP – 12/12/2009

All good things must come to an end – so the saying goes. As a believer in Jesus Christ and a child of God I violently disagree with that saying, for we have only begun to see and experience the good things and the good to come will last for all eternity. But, as far as this current sermon series on Satan's Deadly Trap is concerned, this will be the final installment.

If you haven't yet figured it out, it takes effort to stay free from offence. We have already reviewed **Luke 17:1** time and time again in this series to prepare us for the inevitable – offences will come into our lives and we cannot avoid them.

The context of **2 Timothy 2:26** tells us that the offences we hang onto place us in the snare of the devil and that we are destined to do his will as long as we persist in not coming to our senses and escape – meaning we truly forgive and release the offences in our lives.

We saw in **Matthew 24:9-12** that offences in your life if left unchecked will progress to betrayal, then hatred, and finally to deception; to the point that you will even lose your love for fellow Christians and fall away.

Luke 6:27-36 commands us to love, and to do good to, and to bless, and to pray for those who offend you, and mistreat you, and abuse you. And we saw last week in **Psalm 35:9-14** that the prayers offered on behalf of our enemies needs to be with the same attitude and the same passion as if praying for a beloved brother, sister, or mother.

Romans 12:14-21 showed us that we are to bless our offenders, we are to rejoice with them when they are rejoicing, we are to weep with them when they are weeping, we are to not be arrogant or place ourselves above them but instead be humble in spirit toward them, we are never to pay back evil for evil, and we are to leave all forms of revenge in God's capable hands.

In **1 Peter 3:9** we have the promise from God that if we give blessing instead of returning evil for evil and insult for insult, that we will inherit a blessing from God. In other words, if we immediately release any potential offences and leave matters in God's hands, we will be blessed instead of becoming bitter; and that is always the choice when we are offended. You have the choice of blessing or bitterness.

We saw in the experience of Peter how God's revealed knowledge, or His anointing, comes upon us as we stay free from offence; and **1 John 2:27** tells us that anointing will keep us from deception.

And we have also learned from the example of Jesus Christ that we do not have the right to withhold forgiveness, and that forgiveness is to be given before it is sought or

even if it is never sought. Forgiveness is to be given freely even at the possible expense of being taken advantage of again and again.

And last time we saw that when we hold onto offences we are assuming the position of judge and lawgiver and in essence pushing God off the throne as the only righteous Judge and Lawgiver. We become God's judge when we arrogantly assume His role.

But it takes effort to stay free from offence.

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

Acts 24:16

Let's pray.

The King James Version of the Bible translates this verse in this way: "**And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.**"

The context of this verse is that Paul has been falsely accused and falsely imprisoned by the Jews who hate him and desire to see him put to death. And now Paul is before the Roman governor, Felix, presenting his defense; a defense in which he simply presents the Gospel and publicly forgives his accusers.

But Paul says he has to do his best, or exercise himself, or put forth great effort, to be able to forgive like this. Forgiveness did not come naturally for Paul just like it does not come naturally for any of us. The natural man doesn't forgive because the natural man is selfish. The natural man will forever stand up for his rights and make sure that his best interests are served regardless of the cost to others.

Let's park on this issue for a moment and let's use the wording from the KJV when Paul says he had to **exercise himself** in order to stay free from offence.

I am a great object lesson for exercise. Now hear me out on this; stop laughing. Through the years I have been a student of exercise but over the last twenty years I have not put the knowledge I have into practice. Here's the object lesson, most Christians have to one extent or another been students of the Bible, but for most of their Christian lives they have not put into practice what they have learned. They have enough knowledge to be making progress in their spiritual lives but there has been an utter lack of exercise.

Because of my past experiences and dedication to weightlifting, I am still relatively strong in certain aspects. But my lack of any consistent physical exercise has put me in a vulnerable position. The limits of what I can do today are a far cry from what I could do 25-years ago, and it's not just because I am 25-years older. My muscles are not prepared and conditioned to do certain things anymore – of which I was reminded of after this past snow storm.

It took me three days to shovel my driveway because I could feel the muscles in my back reaching the point of fatigue; a fatigue that leads to a week of bed rest when I

push it too far. I had to stop and rest for several hours each time I reached this point. I think I made 5-6 trips outside over the three days to complete the task. Last year I could have accomplished the same thing in two trips outside – and it would have been in the same day. But I have hardly exercised at all over the last year; I am not prepared or conditioned for this kind of work anymore, and because of this I am much more prone to injury.

Now if I was to call someone up here that exercises regularly and is in good shape, and I purposely hit him in the arm pretty hard, he would be able to take the punch in stride and walk away; assuming he didn't take offence and hit me back. But if I brought someone up here that was completely out of shape and then hit them in the same way, they would probably get injured, or more appropriate for the illustration, wounded.

Beloved, this is what happens to most Christians when the offences come their way; they get wounded because they have not exercised enough; they are out of shape spiritually.

The Greek word that is translated as **exercise** is also defined as, to take pains, to endeavor, or to exercise by training and discipline. In other words, this is the heavy lifting kind of exercise; this is the getting on the treadmill for thirty minutes every day kind of exercise; this not getting up from the couch to grab a can of Coke instead of asking your wife to get it for you and calling it exercise.

In the spiritual sense, this is not just reading your Daily Bread, or spending five minutes reading your Bible while eating breakfast and watching the news on TV. You can't listen to the Bible on CD while shaving and getting dressed and consider yourself spiritually fit and conditioned for anything that will come your way. No, to be conditioned and prepared in the way Paul was before Felix, you have to dedicate yourself to disciplined training in the Lord's gym. It's going to take focused study to be ready, and then it is going to take consistent application and obedience to what you have learned.

If you want to be free and stay free from offence then you must have the mind of Christ, and the only path to having the mind of Christ is to be filled with and immersed in God's Word on a daily basis.

So what kind of exercise program are you on, spiritually speaking?

Before any type of physical exercise it is important to spend plenty of time stretching and getting your muscles warmed up; otherwise you will not be prepared for what you are about to do. Prayer and worship is the best way to spiritually stretch and warm up; preparing your heart and mind for what you are about to do.

Experts say it takes a minimum of twenty to thirty minutes of cardiovascular exercise a day to maintain good heart health. I think 20-30 minutes a day in the reading and study of God's Word would be a good place to start in order to have a healthy spiritual heart.

To build strong and growing muscle it takes another 30-45 minutes of weightlifting every other day. I would equate this with some deeper study; maybe tackling a specific concept or topic in Scripture that includes taking notes and using references and other

helps. Push yourself. Study something you've had trouble with in the past, or try to prove me wrong if I have ever preached or taught something you didn't necessarily agree with. Tackle some tough stuff.

For physical exercise to be the most effective you have to finish what you start in one session. Five minutes of cardio interrupted by ten minutes of rest, followed by another five minutes of cardio, etc., will not be nearly as effective as thirty minutes straight even if both methods end up with thirty minutes of work. If you are serious about your physical health you must set the time aside and not allow for interruptions. The same applies to your spiritual exercise. Schedule the time, keep the appointment, and don't allow for outside interruptions. The phone ringing is rarely, if ever, so important that it can't wait for 30 minutes; let the answering machine or your voicemail do its job and stick with your spiritual exercise.

What's your priority? One of my Facebook friends posted something similar to the following a while back: If you keep saying God is first in your life but the minute you wake up in the morning you are checking your email and your Facebook, and maybe get around to prayer and personal study eventually, you are probably deceived.

For the last several months I have thought about at least doing some exercise immediately after my devotion time, but it never happens. I get my day started with the many tasks ahead and never seem to find the time for physical exercise. Why? – Because it really isn't a priority. I imagine that I would like to be thinner and in better shape, but truthfully, right now I don't. If I really did, I would make it a priority.

Fred Smith, the founder of Federal Express, said this: "*You are the way you are because that's the way you want to be. If you really wanted to be any different, you would be in the process of changing right now.*" Quite honestly, this is the truth, whether it applies to your physical body or your spiritual life; you are the way you are because that's the way you want to be; stop deceiving yourself with anything different.

Don't come up to me and say you wish you knew your Bible better, because that's a lie. If you really want to know your Bible better, what's stopping you? If you really want to forgive, what's stopping you? If you really want to be prepared to release an offence the moment it comes your way, what's stopping you? If you really want to be blessed beyond measure and be in constant fellowship with the Lord, what's stopping you?

Beloved, I say I want to weigh 220 pounds and not get winded walking up the stairs, but it's a lie! There is absolutely nothing stopping me from achieving both of those goals other than me applying the knowledge I have and getting with the program. And there is nothing stopping you from being a mature, conditioned, and well prepared Christian, other than applying what you have learned and getting with the program.

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

Isaiah 58:6

If you still feel like something is stopping you from doing what you need to do, have you ever fasted over it? Have you ever been serious enough to go without food for a period of time to **loosen the bonds of wickedness** and to **undo the bands of the yoke**?

Beloved, of all people, the people of this church should realize the power of fasting; yet I would suspect that very few of you fast on a regular basis outside of the times I call for a corporate fast. Fasting had a part in 39 acres of land being donated to Grace Church. Fasting had a part in over half a million dollars being donated to the building fund of Grace Church. Fasting has had a part in just about every facet of the building of Grace Church – and I'm not talking about the construction taking place across the highway right now. The spiritual and numerical growth of this church would not be where it is today apart from fasting. I believe that in my heart and you cannot convince me otherwise.

So why is the spiritual discipline of fasting, not as much a part of our spiritual lives as praying? As I have preached on before, Jesus gave the same level of importance to praying, giving, and fasting in **Matthew 6**; one was no more important than the other.

If you pray regularly but don't give or fast, you are in essence operating on 33% of the power of God that you could be. If you pray and give, but don't fast, you are in essence operating on 67% of the power of God that you could be. Now I don't know if that's really an accurate statement as far as the percentages, but it is very accurate that you are not where you could be spiritually if one or more of these disciplines are lacking in your life – and fasting, even more so than giving, is typically missing from most Christian's lives.

So if your spiritual life is in a rut, or you are stuck in a particular aspect of your spiritual life, go on a fast over the issue and break that yoke!

Another issue that hinders our spiritual exercise is procrastination. After last week's service one of our members approached me and asked if they should wait until the final sermon in this series or if they should call a relative this week to deal with some offences. I said to not wait but get on with dealing with the offence as soon as possible. This person did so and the healing process has begun.

Satan will be more than happy to supply you with any and every excuse you desire to keep you where you are. Contrary to popular belief, Satan is not attempting to get you to commit some horrible sin when procrastination will accomplish the same goal. As a matter of fact, complacency and procrastination are more effective in suppressing your spiritual growth than a major sin. As long as you are deceived into thinking your spiritual life is okay as is and no changes are needed, Satan has you right where he wants you – lukewarm. And in our Scripture reading tonight we saw how God feels about being lukewarm (**Revelation 3:14-22**).

I don't know if I can emphasize enough how complacency and procrastination are more damaging to your spiritual life than open sin. Open sin will convict you until you deal with it, and once you properly deal with it you will be stronger and more aware of it for the next time; complacency and procrastination doesn't feel like sin, so you leave it alone, and leave it alone, and leave it alone, until you are numb to it and puzzled as to why your spiritual life is stagnant and lacking the power of the Holy Spirit.

Procrastination will stop you from dealing with the offences in your life, stop you from forgiving, and thus stop you from growing and maturing in Christ.

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

James 3:13-16

I dare say that most Christians believe they at least have a little wisdom stored within. Scripture is clear that there are two distinct kinds of wisdom available to us: wisdom from above and wisdom from the world. God's wisdom, or the wisdom from above, is perfect and desirable and necessary for us to mature in Christ. The wisdom of the world, or man's wisdom, can be beneficial in certain aspects but more often than not conflicts with God's wisdom or flat out opposes God's wisdom.

For example, man's wisdom might say borrow the money you need to build a church building; it would be ridiculous to wait until you had all the funds available to build. God's wisdom says to owe nothing to anybody. These two pieces of wisdom oppose each other and I am confident in saying that the churches that chose man's wisdom are feeling the weight of debt and the enslavement they have to the lenders.

Another example is man's wisdom says to always look out for yourself above all others; stand up for yourself and seek justice whenever you are wronged. God's wisdom says to always forgive and to leave justice in His hands.

In general, much of man's wisdom has its basis in selfishness; do what is best for you and/or your organization at the expense of others if necessary. God's wisdom has its basis in love, which as you all should know by now is the very opposite of selfishness.

1 Peter 4:8 says, "**Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.**"

The kind of love that is required to forgive and to release offences comes from God. God gives the fervent love we are to have for one another that allows us to overlook sins against us and to forgive unconditionally. Love supplied by God will give you the ability and even the desire to release the offences in your life.

And if that isn't enough motivation for you, our passage in James is saying that selfish ambition, meaning the attitude and actions that always look out for you and you only (and forgiveness is not an action that fits with selfish ambition), is earthly, natural, and demonic. And James goes on to say that where selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing!

Grasp this for just a moment. Can you see now why your life is a mess when you hold unforgiveness in your heart? Holding an offence and refusing forgiveness is earthly, natural, demonic, it will bring chaos to your life, and opens you up to every evil thing!

Does that put the fear of God into you? Does this realization give you pause to think about any offences you are still hanging onto? Is there any possible way that you could still think refusing to forgive someone is worth it? Are you that self-righteous and

arrogant to stand up and defy God to allow these things into your life just so you can show the world that nobody gets away with crossing you?

That's man's wisdom.

James 3:17-18

I want you to focus on just one aspect of God's wisdom, even though all aspects are important. The one I want you to burn into your mind is that God's wisdom is full of mercy; or said another way, full of forgiveness.

And how are those who display God's wisdom? – The ones who make peace. Those who make peace are sowing the seed of the fruit of righteousness; and beloved, God's law of sowing and reaping says that you will receive far more in return than what you plant.

I had a woman contact me who wanted prayer. Her life was in turmoil. She told me that God revealed to her that unforgiveness in her heart was the root of her problems, but in her discussion with me she was still complaining about what had been done to her; she was still tightly hanging onto the offence. Even in the midst of her pain and suffering and receiving direct communication from the Lord, she was choosing the pain and bitterness and turmoil and struggle over the fruit of righteousness and the blessing of God.

Some will go to their grave wondering why their life was so hard. The more I study this topic in specific and the entire Bible in general, the more I am seeing that most struggle and pain in this life is self-inflicted. And unforgiveness and not releasing offences is the primary cause.

I wonder how many of the struggles you have faced in this life are directly related to the earthly, natural, and demonic act of hanging onto offence and refusing to forgive?

Let's pray.