

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Satan's Appeals

The Lord's appeal through the gospel is spiritual, while Satan's appeal is through the flesh or carnal (Gal. 5:16-25; 1 John 2:15-17). In this class we want to notice some of the carnal appeals that Satan uses to keep people in darkness or lure Christians out of the light and back into his kingdom. These carnal appeals of Satan can be clearly seen among those in Ephesus who opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Luke records the efforts and results of the apostle Paul and his companions in Ephesus as they carried out the commission of Jesus Christ (Acts 19). Paul preached the gospel of Christ and at the same time exposed the religious frauds that existed in that area of Asia Minor (Acts 19:1-17). A positive effect of Paul's preaching in Ephesus was that people repented of their sins, turned to Christ, and the "Word of God grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:18-20). A negative result was that those in error with hardened hearts refused to obey the gospel and sought to destroy the faith of those who did (Acts 19:21-41).

Several different carnal arguments were used in an effort to hinder or destroy the success of the gospel in Ephesus. Let's notice these various carnal appeals and some examples in our day of the exact same appeals made by Satan. Awareness of these fleshly appeals should help us avoid these deadly traps of Satan.

Wealth

Wealth was used by Satan to blind the eyes of those in Ephesus. "Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana" recognized that the gospel could destroy his prosperity (Acts 19:24-25). He stirred up others of his trade and created much confusion. Why would Demetrius not want to obey the truth? Money! Wealth! Materialism! These were his gods and he was not going to give them up for the truth.

Pocketbook religion is all the religion that Demetrius knew and many today follow that same god. They check their pocketbook first and if it going to cost them some-thing financially to serve the Lord, they are not willing to do it.

This carnal appeal is made by many denominational churches today. They preach a gospel of health and wealth. They claim that if you give, give, and give more to their false religion, that you will receive back more in material goods than you gave originally. It sounds good, but the root of the appeal is carnality and its not the appeal of the Spirit.

Successful Religion

Success of the religion was another avenue used by Satan to keep people trapped in false

religion. In his effort to create confusion and win supporters, Demetrius said, "so not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship" (Acts 19:27). What if all Asia and the whole world worshiped the goddess Diana? Would that prove the religion true? Can truth be determined by counting heads?

There are many people in our day who believe like Demetrius. They gather in their religious conventions, councils, or synods and vote on various Bible doctrines, as if a majority vote will change God's will. The Psalmist said concerning the permanent nature of God's Word, "For ever, O Jehovah, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). Some denominational bodies have voiced their approval of homosexuality, abortion, and other sins, but their vote, even if unanimous, cannot change the mind of God.

The appeal of some denominations is to their worldwide success. The Jehovah's Witnesses denomination points to their world headquarters with pride. When questioned about various aspects of their doctrine that are contrary to the doctrine of Christ, they frequently point to their worldwide success as proof that their erroneous doctrine is acceptable with God. They say something like, "We couldn't be world-wide if God wasn't with us" or "Our great success proves that God is with us." These things do not prove any such thing. What would an appeal to numbers have proved in Noah's day? Being in the majority in Sodom and Gomorrah carried no weight with God (Gen. 19).

If success or being in the majority was equivalent to having the truth, then we should look for the largest religious sect and join with them. That would make Catholics, Hindus, Muslims, or something else out of all of us. This likely would not appeal to many who use success as a measure of truth.

Emotionalism

Emotionalism is another ploy used by Satan. There is a place in the gospel for emotion. When we learn that Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins, our emotions ought to be affected. We hear the preaching of the cross, become convicted of sins, and obey the gospel for the forgiveness of those sins, our hearts should rejoice. This is the order found in the New Testament. People heard the gospel, responded to the gospel by confessing their faith in Jesus, repenting of their sins, and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins, then rejoiced at the fact that they were new creatures in Christ (Acts 8:35-39; 2:36-42). Emotion follows the understanding. This is the pattern of truth.

Satan uses emotions to override the understanding. People swayed by their emotions instead of the truth will be stirred to the point of ignoring the truth for a "better felt than told" feeling. Assemblies of this sort are often full of confusion and commotion, with little, if any, Bible instruction taking place.

In Ephesus, the city was filled with confusion and a crowd gathered in the local theater. A man by the name of Alexander wanted to make a reasoned defense of Christianity, but

when it was discovered that he was a Jew "all with one voice cried out for about two hours, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians'" (Acts 19:34). Keep the people confused so that they cannot hear and understand the truth is a tactic that works well for Satan. The people's ability to stop, think, and examine what they believe is overruled by their emotions.

God teaches us to study, learn, and obey his will (2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11; Matt. 11:28-30; 7:21). The assemblies of the churches of Christ in the first century were to be conducted decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). The members of the congregation should be edified and they should be able to understand in such a way that they may be able to say "amen" to the prayers that are offered unto God (1 Cor. 14:26, 16). Visitors to their assemblies should also be able to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

The holiness, charismatic Pentecostal groups of our day conduct services where confusion reigns supreme. Prayers are uttered and everyone begins to mumble aloud so that nothing can be understood and no true "amen" could be said. It is nothing more than confusion being carried on in the name of the Lord. Studying the truth, learning the difference between right and wrong, and examining the Word of God is far removed from these assemblies. The whole atmosphere is geared toward entertainment and not true worship unto God.

Tradition

Tradition is also used by Satan to prevent people from responding in a positive way to the truth. Satan could not make his appeal to truth, but he could appeal to what the people had always believed. The city clerk of Ephesus made a statement to the crowd in the theater after he had quieted them. He said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?" Implied in this statement is the idea that Diana has been worshiped for years in Ephesus and any religion that has been around as long this one could not be wrong. "We have always believed in Diana and we always will" is the appeal to traditionalism.

The fact that someone has always believed something to be true does not make it true. For centuries many scientists believed the world to be flat. Did this long-standing belief or tradition make it flat?

This attitude is alive today. The Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and many mainstream denominations are built around what their forefathers believed. It matters not to them that the truth condemns their practices (Col. 3:17). Infant baptism, sprinkling substituted for immersion, Christmas and Easter observances, and instrumental music are just a few of their traditions that are completely foreign to the Scriptural worship and practice of the New Testament church. Jesus said of the traditionalists of his day, "And in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Conclusion

These tactics, wealth, success, emotionalism, and traditionalism, are effective tools of Satan. He will use these individually or he will combine them to make them more appealing. He will thread them together to make them appear stronger, but these false appeals cannot stand up to the power of the gospel. Let's be aware of these carnal appeals and not succumb to the temptation to use these appeals in-stead of the gospel of Jesus which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).