

Sharpening Your Discernment

For those of you who have been here over the last several weeks, you know that I have been engaged in a series on Spiritual Warfare. What I have been attempting to express is the basic idea that we really cannot understand life, our own individual lives; we can't understand the newspapers that we read, or news from around the world; we can't understand the Christian church or its history; or human history in general, without setting it all against the backdrop of a great cosmic struggle between God and Satan.

Now some people, I know, when they think about Satan, the devil or demons, have in their minds some person who is so self-evidently evil; who's tactics are so obvious; who, when he speaks, is so apparent that he is speaking evil, that, of course, all of us will immediately recognize that this is not God. You know, he will come to you and say, "How would you like to sacrifice a bunch of chickens to me and wear bizarre clothing? Put body earrings in your throat and then we will all go out and kill some cats together." This is not the approach that the Bible takes to Satan or to the whole spiritual realm of darkness. It is not all just like the movie "The Exorcist."

We are repeatedly told in the Bible, in verses like 2 Corinthians 11:14, that Satan masquerades, he play-acts, he masquerades as an angel of light. Then in verse 15 it says, "It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness."

The problem that we have in doing spiritual warfare is that it is not always obvious what Satan sounds like. He doesn't introduce himself with a "Blah, blah, I want to suck your blood." If he did, we would all run. There would be no need to talk about spiritual

warfare, no need to point out the dangers of the demonic, things would be so obvious that all of us would wonder, “Why bother discussing this? We know we aren’t supposed to put our hands in the fire. We know we are not supposed to drink sulfuric acid. And we are not going to follow Satan. Thank you, that was really instructive teaching.”

But when it comes to the demonic realm, we are repeatedly told that Satan works by cunning, by deception, by masquerade, by play-acting. His servants come as wolves in sheep’s clothing. Many times they quote the Bible. They may use words like “compassion” and “dignity” and “freedom,” but they are used as a cloak, a cover, a mask. It is because Satan comes in masquerade form that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 is the ability to distinguish between spirits – the gift of discernment. We would not need a spiritual gifting of discernment, what is of God and what is of Satan, if it was apparent to the natural mind. But the Holy Spirit brings enlightenment. And the text that emphasizes discernment is Hebrews 5:13:

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though, by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, still being an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

What the writer is saying is that the ability to make distinctions between what is of God and what is not of God, what is good and what is evil, is a sign of maturity, of growing up in the faith. And this is true, throughout the scriptures. Babies, spiritual babies or actual chronological babies, are said in the Bible over and over again to be

people who don't know good and evil. They don't know the difference; they don't know what's bad to say or to look at or to touch. But spiritual maturity, or physical maturity that carries with it a maturing in righteousness means that you are able to discern, to know when something is really bad and to stay away from it. Or that something is really good and you should be in love with it.

See, I believe that in the spiritual infancy of the human race, as the Lord was attempting to train people in spiritual discernment, he gave the Jews in the Old Testament these various physical object lessons. One of these object lessons was the rule about what to eat. You read through the Old Testament, there are all of these rules about what the Jews couldn't eat and what they could eat. And it said that certain animals were considered clean or kosher for food, like cows, goats and sheep. And other animals are considered unclean for food and those animals would include pigs, horses and camels.

Now there is a great debate regarding why God gave all of these rules for what the Jews were allowed to eat and what they weren't allowed to eat. Many people believed that these were health regulations. There is some argument to be made for that. And other people believe that this was a way to separate the Jews from the surrounding culture. There is an argument to be made for that.

But one of the things that I have always believed was true about the rules regarding food is that the Lord was training people to make distinctions between good and evil, between clean and unclean, and ultimately between God and Satan who masquerades as an angel of light. All through the book of Leviticus, for example in verses like Leviticus 10:10:

“You must distinguish between the holy and profane, between the unclean and the clean, you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given to them.”

In Leviticus 20:

“You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds.”

Or even in Ezekiel, the priests were rebuked because, as Ezekiel says, “You do not distinguish between the holy and the common. They teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean.”

Why the food regulations in the Old Testament? To train the Jews in the spiritual infancy of the human race, to train the Jewish people that not everything gets lumped together. There are certain things that are of God and there are certain things that are not of God. And I think this was one of those elementary kinds of lessons to bring us to a more sophisticated maturity so that we begin to make distinctions in the spiritual realm. Not everything spiritual is of God.

The book of Ecclesiastes has a little verse that I borrowed from in picking a title for today’s talk. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, “If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, the more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.” In other words, the writer of Ecclesiastes is saying that we need to have sharpened tools, we need sharpened skills in being able to live successfully and have successful ministries and successful careers. But if you are not sharp, if the edge of your discernment is not honed, then you may be working really hard at your marriage, really hard at trying to be emotionally healthy, or

really hard in ministry; if you are not sharp, you will likely be unsuccessful in the work of life.

Today, what I want to talk about is sharpening your discernment, learning to recognize the voice of Satan. You need to be able to figure out as you are listening to a teaching or evaluating a church – some of you are church shopping, you may be new to town and looking around for a church or are in the process of moving from one church to another, you are listening to a teaching on the radio or by way of tape – is that God? Is that a little off? How do I know?

On a more personal level there are issues in your own life that you must sort through. Perhaps you are reading counseling advice in a magazine or a book – about your marriage, or child raising, or resolving conflict with a friend or your sex life. What does the voice of God sound like and what is that other voice from the pit? We will talk about sharpening your discernment today. Let's pray.

We are attempting to learn some of Satan's calling cards, his modus operandi. He is a masquerader, a hider, a cunning foe that pretends that he is really a servant of righteousness. He is not obvious. How do we know what Satan's voice sounds like?

Well, let me give you a little illustration from John Bunyon's "Pilgrim's Progress." I might have used this in a prior talk, I don't remember. But "Pilgrim's Progress" is one of the great classics of Christian literature. It is a story of Pilgrim, and how he is making his way along the road to the celestial city, meaning heaven. Pilgrim is, of course, an allegory for Christians. We are on our way to heaven, but we have to walk in this world.

So one day Pilgrim is walking along the road and on either side of the road there are these two roaring lions that are on chains. Now Pilgrim hears the interpretation of what

he is seeing that Satan is a roaring lion, 1 Peter 5, “Satan is a roaring lion seeking for someone to devour.” And, interestingly, in the story Pilgrim can’t see that the lions are on those chains. Very often, we don’t see that there are limits to what Satan can do. We are really afraid that some demon or Satan is going to leap upon us or into our lives, we don’t see that there are limits. He is on a chain. How many people are so afraid of even praying for someone who may have a demonic problem or even thinking about it because, “My goodness, Satan is going to ruin your life and ruin your family if you deal with him.” One of the ways Satan keeps us all bound up is by making us afraid of dealing with the demonic.

Christians, you don’t need to be afraid. You have authority. But you also don’t stumble blindly toward the lion’s mouth, either. These are things and situations to stay away from. One of the things that Bunyon was attempting to communicate by his illustration, which I think was really true biblically, is that Satan hangs out on the edges of the road, on the extreme. But if, as Christians, we walk right down the center of the road, we are going to be safe.

To put it another way, Satan is an extremist. And the mark of something off in teaching or counseling will be that the person who is communicating to you is communicating extreme thinking that sounds like it is either all one way or all the other way.

Let me boil this down for you so that you understand what I am saying as a foundational principle. Then we will apply it in a few different areas. The mark of true Christianity from a biblical perspective is that true Christianity has worked into its very fiber ambiguity, mystery. The apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16,

“Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness [literally the mystery of our religion] is great. He [some manuscripts say “God”] appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.”

The attempt to eliminate all mystery from Christianity, to make it all perfectly simple and comprehensible, perfectly explainable to the finite human mind, that is a mark of falseness. We believe in a God who is a trinity – also a unity – both three and one. We believe in a Lord who is both fully divine and fully human, yet one person; in a Bible that is both fully divine and fully human, yet one inspired book.

Or to use a different text [and then I will bring this home] – many people have struggled over the centuries trying to put together the great mystery of God’s sovereignty, of God’s control that is clearly taught in the Bible, and human responsibility and fit those things together in some way that holds onto both God’s sovereignty and our responsibility – these two tension points that don’t seem to fit together well. I find it interesting that the apostle Paul, when he was speaking about these two great truths, put them back to back in Roman’s 9 and 10.

In Romans 9, I believe Paul is laying out the great truth of God’s sovereignty. And then in Romans 10 he immediately speaks of man’s responsibility. And after speaking in Romans 9 about God’s sovereignty and in Romans 10 about man’s responsibility, in Romans 11 he sums up the whole matter with this statement,

“Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to

God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

He is telling us, as a summation of the sovereignty/responsibility puzzle that certain things are unsearchable and that we must, as finite human beings, bow down before the infinite mind of God and say, “God, this one is a puzzle that only you know.”

But false teaching eliminates puzzles. And false teaching eliminates one side of the truth that is to be in tension. It eliminates both/and, and opts for either/or. It eliminates the ambiguity, the mystery. False teaching is like a coin that only has tails on it, but the truth is almost always two-sided. I gave you an example of that last week when I said that, in some parts of the evangelical world, we hit with only one fist, the fist of truth, when the Bible hits with both fists, truth and power, words and works. It is not enough to hit with just words, we must also hit with deeds, with works, to be biblical people.

Another example would be some churches, so interested in reaching out to the world in evangelism that they don't reach up in worship to God. Oh, well everyone is going to get offended if we reach up to God because it will take away from our ability to reach out to the world.

Or, on the other hand, some churches are so consumed with reaching up to God that there is no reaching out to the lost for whom Christ shed his blood. Biblically, there are hundreds of verses that tell us the church is worship and evangelism, not either/or.

So, I want to give you a few examples in areas that affect us as Americans in the 90's where both sides of the truth are not taught and where the voice of the demonic pushes people to an extreme. And I would like to start with ourselves.

Now, over the last thirty years in America, we have been drenched by a spirit, a form of teaching that strongly affirms the self as *the* defining reality. From a very young age you are taught to be kind to yourself, to be true to yourself. We have a country that is saturated with me-centered thinking that has explored my needs and my wants and I and me, my goals, my values. From the preschool age on, we go to schools where there are big banners saying, "You are the most important person in the world." Children get happy faces on the homework papers just for handing them in. Kids get trophies just for being on the team because everyone must always feel important.

So we have 250 million people struggling to feel really important. And we are surrounded here in this church by people who need to feel very, very important. You are surrounded at work by people who want to feel very important. Your kids need to feel important. So do their teachers and the people in Washington and your boss and your employees. Everyone is trying to feel very important.

What has occurred, though, is that as we have built people up and taught them to be fully in touch with their needs and their wants and their goals and their wishes, we find, not surprisingly, that these very important people are also very, very selfish. We have become incredibly well-trained in looking out for number one. We have been taught that that is how we should live. That we should come first. This is wonderful if we all lived in a cave by ourselves. But when we get together in a group, in a church, in a marriage, in a work place, in a school yard, and all of us very important people, whose opinions may not be overlooked, are looking out for number one, and all kinds of fights and arguments and violence and fragmentation enter in our relationships.

So, we discover, again not surprisingly, that relationships in America are incredibly fragile as a result of this selfist teaching, that there is this impermanence in relationships so that things like vows, promises, duty, children, sick husbands, sick wives, older wives or older husbands get thrown out as people search for that elusive thing called self-fulfillment and a feeling of self-importance.

If Mommy or Daddy is not happy, if they need to leave home to find themselves, then to hell with the kids and the promises and everyone's trauma. I must be true to myself. And some of you sitting here are victims of that kind of thinking and some of us have been victimizers.

I read an ad in a magazine, *Psychology Today*, which pretty much sums up what I am saying about this self-affirmation and self-fulfillment as the only criteria for living life well. The ad says,

“I love me. I am not conceited. I am just a good friend to myself. And I like to do whatever makes me feel good. We live by a certain philosophy. We try to make our dreams come true today instead of waiting for tomorrow. But you must do good things for yourself. You must first know yourself. Self-knowledge is the first step to self-satisfaction. Think about it.”

I thought about it and I thought, “This is demonic teaching. It is an extreme.” Now, that is the extreme that we are going to find in the secular community. That is the extreme that we are going to find in our school system. This is the extreme that you are going to find in secular counseling and in magazine columns, as a general rule. You are going to explore, as a general rule, universally, this is not an indictment of all secular counselors,

but as a general rule you will explore your needs, your wants, your wishes, what is supposedly best for you.

Now this is the secular edge of the road. But let me share with you what the church, the unhealthy Christian's edge of the road, is for those of you who may have grown up in the church family in America, because you weren't raised with that side of the road at all. In extreme and unhealthy church environments, you were raised on the other side of the road with self-denial. Jesus, of course, taught self-denial. He said in Matthew 10:39,

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

But you were taught self-denial like this: that you ought to always feel bad about yourself, period! The worse you feel about yourself, the holier you are. It is probably safest to always feel guilty. Indeed, the moment you stop feeling guilty you are probably falling into self-deception and pride! But self-denial is always a means of finding life, of finding real joy and peace. Always feel bad, then you will know you are not being proud!

Teaching comes across like this: that in order to lift God up so that he would be magnified, we must preach people down. And I have actually heard it preached just that way. “You have to preach man down in order to lift God up.” Like God is so insecure that he needs to step on us to feel good about himself. People who are raised in this kind of church environment [and I know some of you were raised in that kind of environment] walk around thinking that all of your opinions are probably wrong, that your thoughts are probably wrong. You may have been made to feel bad because you have emotion, because you cry, because you get angry, because you have sexual feelings, ultimately

because you are a human being. You are supposed to feel you have no talents, even though the Bible teaches each of you have gifts and talents to be used in some ministry of the church – “No, I just can’t do anything!”

And this distorted teaching of self-denial spread in the church early on in the Christian church’s history where asceticism took hold and taught that if they really enjoyed anything in creation that they were not holy. You are not allowed to enjoy the sunset. You are not allowed to enjoy a good book. You are not allowed to enjoy music. Smash your records. Satan hates God’s creation.

How, how do we walk in the middle of the road regarding ourselves? You have this self-aggrandizing, secular teaching on the one hand. Our self as the definer of all of life and our goals are the only criteria for making decisions. And on the other hand, you have this distorted Christian teaching that says you are nothing, you are a worm, you should feel bad, you should feel guilty – ah, doesn’t that feel good for some of you? You say, “Yes, I feel so normal now. This feels like the shame-based stuff I grew up on. Now I know I am home.”

Well, the middle of the road is this: you are to deny what you are by way of the fall and you are to affirm and strengthen what you are by way of creation and redemption. Let me repeat. When I say that you are to deny what you are by way of the fall, that is what Jesus is talking about when he says that we need to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him. Not deny what you are by way of creation, deny what you are, deny yourself, that self life by way of the fall. Deny the fallen, sinful idea that you are the center of the world. Deny the fallen, sinful idea that you are like a God. You are not the center of the world. And I hope you tell your kids that a lot! God is the center of the

world. He is the most important person in our lives. Deny the fallen, sinful idea that your needs and your wants and your convenience are to be in the driver's seat. God's truth is to be in the driver's seat. That propels you and steers you. What God says. Not what you feel or what you think, or your attitudes. But what God says.

We deny that aggressive, self-aggrandizing, self-prompting, self-seeking person in us who always wants to be first. We deny that. But, then, we affirm and bless with God's blessing all that is in us by way of creation and redemption. By way of creation, you all have emotions. They are not bad or unholy or unchristian. They are put in you by God in creation. You were made an emotional being. And so I bless that in you. It is not wrong to have sexual feelings. It is wrong to apply them to someone who you are told doesn't belong to you. But sexual feelings are not bad – read the Song of Solomon, men and women!

It is not wrong to enjoy music or a good meal or sports or a good book or the sun or the beach. Those of you who feel guilty about lounging on the beach from time to time, ask yourself, "Why did God make beaches anyway? He didn't need them." It was for your enjoyment, silly. And that is why he made the woods, so that you can hike in them. And that is why he made the birds, so that you could listen to them. All of creation is designed to be a blessing to you.

Let me give you a couple of other pairs of things, and then we are going to move on. I see the extremism of Satan as we try to live in this world as believers in Christ. On the one hand, I get newsletters all the time from various Christian organizations citing to me alarming and shocking trends in our society. I hear about our leaders joking about extra-marital affairs, as if lying to your spouse doesn't say anything about your character. I

hear about kids who have their Bibles confiscated at school. I read alarming statistics in terms of sexually transmitted diseases, violence, illegitimacy of educational test scores – now when you read all this as I do, I know what it produces in you, because I feel the same things in me. And what that produces in you is a great defensiveness toward the world, an anger, a fear, and a defensiveness. Sometimes we just want to build a thousand foot thick wall and hide so that the world doesn't break in upon us or our children. Let's all move out to the country, maybe another country, maybe the moon.

On the other hand, I am thrilled when I go into a bookstore, as I did recently. Just last week I went over to Border's with Marlene. We usually spend a couple of hours there on our day off together. They allow you to drink coffee in the back and read their books. You can put them back up on the shelf. To me that is about as close to heaven as you can get in this world, a huge place that will let you read their books for free and will serve you coffee, and to have a wife who likes to do that with you! Friends, it doesn't get any better than this!

But as I was looking over the new books, it struck me how many of the titles involves spiritual matters. I recognize that, almost to a tee, most of the spiritual books that you are seeing on the best sellers' list are not Christian spirituality, but I am personally thrilled that we have a culture now out there that is saying that material prosperity that was so taught in the 50's and 60's, 70's and 80's is not the answer to our deepest human needs. And sex is not the answer. Having another sexual experience is not the answer to our deepest human needs. Finding a new, younger girlfriend so that I can dump my wife is not the answer. Having abs of steel and buns of steel is not the answer. There has to be more. Now, I don't know what you thought about New Age teaching or what you

thought about the current violence in society, but I believe one side of the road as you look at America is this feeling of tremendous exhilaration and hope.

The Christian looks at what is going on in society today and says, “People are absolutely, by the millions, coming to the conclusions that many of the old, materialistic answers are not the true answers. That many of the old goals and dreams, that if we have a lot of money and a prosperous society, that will make us content, have turned out to be false. We are miserable in the extreme. We can’t build enough prisons to keep us safe.

That thrills me. Because that tells me that we have a society of people who are very much like the society that Jesus encountered. That was like the Roman world that Paul encountered. A society in turmoil. A society totally open to spiritual answers. A society for whom the old gods have faded. We have a society fully prepared now for the gospel. I believe now, and I say this without an ounce of hype in it, I believe that we have, and you have, a greater opportunity for sharing the gospel right now and finding receptivity than we have had in the last one hundred years in America. This is a society prepared for the gospel.

So, just as we had two ways with the world, it is not enough to have one way. Defensiveness, you know, protecting, let’s all hunker down and protect our children – that is not enough. That is the edge of the road. That is one extreme. Don’t let the newsletters and radio shows shut you off.

Now, do we just sort of send our kids off, or we don’t just trot off and embrace everything saying, “Isn’t this wonderful. We are all spiritual together.” There are two ways with the world. You ought to be really hopeful, because this is a great and

opportune time for you to talk with friends and family, to invite friends and family and coworkers to church with you, to pray with people.

But you ought also to be very concerned. Because if the gospel is not embraced, there is simply not enough left in this society to hold people up. There are not enough support structures, there is not enough of the remembrance of Christian principles, there is not enough. Profound hope and profound concern.

And, like the two ways with the self and the two ways with the world, Christian teaching teaches two ways with the kingdom of God. And here again, I see the extreme teaching in the classic, Pentecostal/conservative evangelical divide. The classic Pentecostal position has been what I might call the Corinthian error.

You know, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians and if you want to think about the Corinthians, you might want to think about them as being sort of hyper-Pentecostals. They had a problem. It was distorted Pentecostalism. There is healthy Pentecostalism, but this was distorted.

The problem was that they found themselves on the already side of the kingdom of God. Paul writes to them in Corinthians 4:

“Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Already you have become kings.”

This is extreme teaching. We have it all right now. You can claim it all right now. You are a King’s kid! Just name it and claim it. Blab it and grab it. You can write your own ticket with God. You can sit on the throne now. This is an extreme. It is a caricature. But that extreme exists.

The other extreme, on the other edge of the road, is a teaching that says, “It is all not yet.” That basically, in some conservative evangelical churches, we have nothing now other than the hope of the future. So we spend most of our time thinking about a seven-year tribulation period and the millennial kingdom in which everything is going to be turned upside down and turned around and be made right. And, so, we have our maps and charts out and we have the whole seven-year period of the tribulation completely laid out. Totally focused on the future, but not on the already, not on the present. That is an extreme side of the road.

You know, they did healings back then and we will do healings way ahead in the future, but not now. They did signs and wonders back then; we will see signs and wonders in the future, but not now. There were charismatic gifts back then; there will be charismatic gifts in the future, but not now. Nothing is now. They even call it this big parenthesis. We just happen to have the misfortune of being stuck in an eternal parenthesis.

That, my friends, I don't believe is the New Testament. The New Testament has two ways with the Kingdom, because there are two ways with the King. Because there are two comings of Christ. And if you want to picture the New Testament teaching about the kingdom of God, you can think about it like a suspension bridge in which there are two great pillars onto which the cables of the kingdom are stretched. We have one great pillar, the first coming of Christ. We have another great pillar, the second coming of Christ. And now there are cables stretched and a bridge between. We live between the times, between comings of Christ. We live with an already. He came. But not yet, he will come again.

So Paul says that already we are more than conquerors. Right now. Romans 8 says,

“You are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

But he also says that creation right now is subject to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that creation itself will one day be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. That right now creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth.

More than conquerors, but we are groaning. Paul says that right now we are dead to sin, but we also see this principle at work in our bodies of sin. Paul says that everything was subjected to him, but we do not yet see all of that. We see Jesus. Hebrews 2. There is an already and a not yet.

And here is how it works out. Already, because Jesus came, we can see healings, but not everyone, not all at the same time. Already, we can give prophetic words, but they will not always be accurate since we see and hear through a dark glass, darkly. Already we will teach the Bible, but all of our teachings will not be 100% accurate. There will be a mix of truth and error in everything because we take two ways with the kingdom – already, it is already here; but, it is not yet complete.

Let me take just one more area that we must approach in this two-sided way, walking right down the middle, otherwise we will be devoured. And that is that we must take two ways with the truth. Like the kingdom, like the world, like ourselves, we find extreme positions that can be very dangerous as they come into the church. There can be this extreme of objectivism, in which people have a strictly empirical approach to life. You see this in many conservative, evangelical churches. The extreme of objectivism and this strictly empirical approach to life would say to you that unless you can prove your

experience, it is not real and it is probably not valuable. You must be able to prove it. Objective truth is elevated not above subjective experience, but to the exclusion of subjective experience.

In this extreme objectivism, academic knowledge and information becomes the very pinnacle and apex of spirituality. Spiritual authority is based on knowledge and the academic credentials of a leader. This is a peculiar thing, since biblically spiritual authority had very little to do with academic credentials. It was said of the disciples that they were very uneducated people, but carried great spiritual authority because spiritual authority is not based on academics or knowledge. It is always based on one's intimacy with God. How well do you know God? How well do you know God's ways? How well do you know God's voice? God's activities? God's reality? God's word? You have spiritual authority when you know and reflect God. And you don't have it, regardless of your title or seminary degree, if you don't have intimacy with God.

So the extreme objectivism position limits God to only working in the explainable, understandable ways. But on the other side, we have extreme subjectivism, in some Pentecostal churches, that can create tremendous abuse where truth is decided on the basis of feelings, in environments where people give more weight to their feelings than they give to the Bible. You know, there are some places where people can't really be expected to make a decision unless some leader gets a revelation or a word or a prophesy. And these words can become very controlling of people's lives. The words of some leader are given more weight than the words of Paul or the words of Jesus. In those settings, education and knowledge is disdained sometimes and people take pride in not

being educated at all, and pride in not really reading anything because they have the anointing.

So, again, rather than walk on the edge and be devoured by the lions, we must walk down the middle of the road holding onto the scriptures and what the scriptures teach, which is that experiences, Biblical experiences, are part and parcel of the Christian life. What is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit other than an experience? Romans 5:5 and Romans 5:8 make no sense as doctrines simply to be received by the mind. Love in our heart is an experience, it is subjective, but it is subjective to biblical parameters.

What does the apostle Peter mean by “joy inexpressible and full of glory” other than the experience of joy in the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be fervent in the Spirit? Or to walk in all of God’s ways and to love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? Or to listen to the words of Jesus so that they burn in us as they did in the disciples when he spoke to them on the way to Emmaus? What does it mean to have Godly sorrow that leads to repentance, except to experience sorrow and tears? What is thanksgiving without a feeling of thanksgiving or gratitude? What does the Psalmist say, “Happy is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord.” What is godly zeal or songs of praise or the book of Song of Solomon – what does all of that mean without emotion or great subjectivity?

Yet, that subjectivity must be measured and plumbed by, and stand to the judgment of this book. You have two ways with truth and we need both the objectivity of the Word and then the subjectivity of what the Word teaches which is a full range of biblical experience.

Satan is an extremist. He lives on the edges. You need to walk down the middle, to be balanced in your thinking and balanced in your approach to biblical truths.

But Satan is not only an extremist, he is a corrupter. See, again, he doesn't approach us and say, "I want to suck your blood." What he does is that he holds before us certain virtues and positive qualities and we find ourselves rationalizing our behavior because of some umbrella of positive qualities, but he has corrupted that thing. He has drawn us away from God by corrupting virtues. And, frankly, I believe that Christians are led astray by Satan more often through corrupted virtues than by obvious vices.

Let me give you a couple of examples in finishing up. Satan corrupts the virtue of freedom. We all want freedom. We want that sense of being without restraint, without bonds. 2 Peter 2:19 says that false teachers promise people freedom while they, themselves, are slaves of depravity. For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. Folks all over the place, Christian and non-Christian people, are looking for freedom.

You know, I may need to break my promise to stay at this job or help in this ministry – I can't be limited or bound by my word. I need to be free to get the most for my future! You need to express your sexuality. You need to be free to express your sexuality in whatever form that is going to take.

What's the matter, are you afraid to drink with us or to do drugs?

What's wrong with you? Aren't you free?

Satan comes along and entices us by the virtue of freedom. Of course, he corrupts the meaning of true freedom. Freedom includes the power to say "no" when you want to say "no." Many people have drunk in Satan's corrupted freedom. We have lost our power to say "no" when we earnestly want to say "no." We are no longer free to say no. He

offered us freedom and then stole our freedom. And so now we have become slaves and we can no longer say “no” to an entangling homosexual relationship. We thought it would bring freedom.

You can no longer say no to pornography when it is available. You cannot say no to a man when you go out on a date. You can’t say no to masturbation – or no to food, or no to people, because we are slaves to people-pleasing. Satan is a corrupter and so he corrupts the notion of freedom.

Under the umbrella of the word love, he drags in every vile thing and every mean thing that anyone has ever thought of. Under the umbrella of love we have sick, codependent lives in which one person helps somebody in their addictions. I will help you in your drug use. I will go along with you in your use of pornography. I will help you abuse alcohol. Many wives find themselves in that situation, helping husbands abuse some substance and apologizing for them and making things comfortable for them when they are drunk. I will help you abuse me by apologizing to you when you strike me, husband. We cater to self-destructive, horrible attitudes – “Oh, well, that’s just the way she is!” We fail to discipline children – love means always having an excuse and always defending our kids. We let folks get off scot-free from any bad consequences for bad behavior. We turn into enablers, robbing folks of the human dignity of personal responsibility.

Under the label of love we do some of the most hurtful things we can possibly think of, including Jack Kavorkian murdering people. Satan corrupts virtues. We have organizations like “Compassion in Dying” who want to love people by gassing them. We love our unborn children by aborting them. Corruption is his calling card.

Satan corrupts peace, another great virtue, so that instead of being peace makers as Jesus calls us to be – he says, “Blessed are the peace makers” – many of us become peace keepers in which we attempt to preserve the peace at all costs. There is such a major difference between making peace and keeping peace. Making peace requires, often, the hard work of stirring things up and painfully confronting an area of sin or abuse or an attitude problem that somebody would prefer you did not confront.

Keeping peace means to sweep it all under the rug. And we will all dance around the rug and pretend that there isn't a bump in the rug until the rug gets so big that we all fall over it. And then we pretend that the bump under the rug is something else entirely. We won't talk about it – the issue isn't the issue in the church, or in the home, in your friendship. No, it's something else entirely.

Making peace means we confront life with our eyes open. And keeping peace means that I walk through life with my eyes closed. Making peace often requires confrontation.

Paul occasionally uses the peace-making device of confrontation. He refers in 2 Corinthians to writing a painful letter and just a few weeks ago I had to do that with someone. I had to write a painful letter and lay out with a person how they were relating. It is totally appropriate for the sake of peace-making that we rock the boat with our spouse from time to time. And you rock the boat with your kids. And you rock the boat with a woman in your women's group. Or someone at the job that you are employing. Or a friend – and you tell them the truth about an attitude or an issue or an addiction in their life that is causing pain to themselves, or causing pain to others, or causing pain to you.

When you watch someone on a downward spiral, you watch them sink into criticalness toward God or his people, or self pity. You are afraid that they are going to go over the edge in terms of making a major mistake. Their marriage is breaking down and they are just watching it with a crazy attitude. You don't keep the peace, you make the peace by telling the truth.

Let me give you one text to finish up with today: 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. These verses contain spiritual warfare. And I believe that one of the ways that we get involved in spiritual warfare is through confronting each other with the truth. Paul says,

“The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

What Paul is saying is very simple. He is saying that, basically, the tools of our trade are such that we have a job to correct screwy, corrupted thinking. Screwly thoughts in ourselves and in those we love that depart from the Bible. And we drag that screwly thinking back toward the mind and thoughts of Christ. We have screwly thinking.

How am I to relate in my marriage? The husband has screwly thoughts that say, “Hey, I deserve a night out every week with my buddies. And the money I make is my money and I don't have to tell her what I do with it. My father never told my mother what he did; I don't have to tell her what I do or who I'm with.

In peace-making we demolish that screwly thought. And you bring those thoughts subject to the mind of Christ. You see screwly thinking in child-raising. You know, “My

parents never spent any time with me and I turned out OK, so I don't have to spend any time with my kids."

People have screwy thoughts about how to find themselves. I need 4 years to find myself. No, we love others, we hold on to the truth, that's how we find ourselves.

People have screwy thoughts about where money should fit into their lives and what kind of house they should build. And what they should furnish the house with.

And they have screwy thoughts about sex and living and the world and career advancement and what kinds of hurtful things we can say or do with each other. Paul says, "I confront these things that wound people and I really make peace now."

This is an appropriate thing that we do. It is appropriate. Let me tell you that it is appropriate to do that if you love someone, but not if you don't. God has not made you, and he has not made me, "Bishop of Columbus." And if I don't love someone, I have no business confronting anything in their life. If you are not sure if you love someone, then don't say anything. If you don't care about the other person, then leave them alone and pray for them.

Confrontation also doesn't mean that we want to turn the church into a bunch of nit-pickers who get under each other's fingernails and are super-critical in the ways that we relate to our spouses and kids, or what we wear, or how we drive, or what we drive. No. We are talking about the things that injure someone and injure our relationship with each other, or injure us in our relationship with God.

See, Paul says in Romans 14 that the kingdom of God does not consist in food or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. There is an order to this. And some of us want peace without going through righteousness. Peace is built on

righteousness. I can't have peace with you while we deny the truth. And I know that many of us have been raised in family systems that just denied the truth. And we have always said, "There are no problems here. Mom and Dad are getting along great, no problems." You denied your feelings.

And you were raised in church systems where you were not allowed to talk up. And if you talked up, you were shot down. You were cut to bits. No peace there. You want peace? Then build it on righteousness. No righteousness, no peace.

Righteousness comes before peace. Peace is built on righteousness. And when you have righteousness and peace, then you can experience joy.

The last way that Satan corrupts things, and then we will close in prayer, Satan is also a great corrupter of truth. In the corruption, people use this virtue of truth to destroy other lives. "I am just speaking the truth" and truth becomes a weapon to cut, not to heal, not to build up, but to cut. Some of the most demonic, angry attacks are done in the name of truth.

Of course, we have the great lie that we can make up our own truths. I get to make up whatever truth I prefer. You know, that always reminds me of making up a map. We want to get to Cleveland and so we write our own map. Because I get to make my own truth up, I will write my own map and on that map, Cleveland is to the west. So I will travel west from Columbus and I will get to Cleveland. You can make up your own maps, but there is a real Cleveland and you won't get there by traveling west.

People can make up their own truths in the corrupt understanding of truth, but they won't get to God unless they go through Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. The truth is, I would prefer that certain truths weren't part of the truth. That at the

end of the road, I wouldn't face judgement. That at the end of the road, I wouldn't be held accountable for things. I would prefer that I get off scot-free, that there were no rewards. We all got the same. But there is the truth. There is a judgement. There are rewards. And we are accountable.