

The Positive Side of Satan

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About a month ago, I gave a sermon on not underestimating the influence Satan can have in our day to day lives. One of things I mentioned in that sermon, is that the Bible pictures Satan as a roaring lion, going about searching for whom he may devour. It continually warns us to be on guard, because this lion is after us. He is stalking us and seeking opportunities to kill us. Basically, we need to be constantly aware that we are not making ourselves vulnerable. We must be relying on God for protection.

When we think about this particular subject, it can present our physical minds with some challenging concepts. We have a picture of an all-powerful, loving Father, who has a lion stalking his children and trying to kill them. God allows this situation to go on, but He warns His children to be aware of this and to rely on Him, as He will protect them. But He allows the situation to go on. where, if the children are negligent and don't heed the warning and don't rely upon Him, the lion can kill and eat them. That sounds very puzzling to us as physical human beings.

Think about it, if you were a physical father and you know that there's a lion stalking your children, what would you do? A lot of physical fathers would quickly find themselves down at the gun store, buying a really big rifle and, at the first available opportunity, they would shoot the lion. You shoot the lion, you kill him, problem would be solved and the situation finished. Here we have a situation with an all-powerful, loving Father who warns His children there's a lion out there trying to kill and eat them, but He doesn't just take a rifle and shoot it. Why this would happen can be very puzzling to us as physical human beings.

We are going to look at this subject to understand just why a loving Father does this and what is His purpose behind this. If you would like a title for this sermon, it's:

The Positive Side of Satan

Let me briefly explain this title. I am not implying that Satan has a good side to him. He's an evil, maniacal being who is rotten to the core. The reason I mention the positive side of this, is because when we see the reason the Father allows him to be in the equation in the long run, there is a positive side to this picture. I often love to point out that to understand the subject of love or how God approaches things, we have to ask the right question. As physical human beings, we are very often asking the wrong question. Our question is, does it feel good? In other words, things that feel right to our emotions and how we think—we think must be right. If it feels bad, then that must be bad and wrong, as it does not feel good to us. But God asks a different question. His question is, does it do good, because it's not about how it immediately feels to us or what the experience is like on the short run. It is the long-term benefits and how the

movie ends. That tends to be where His focus is. It seems a very simple concept, but as we will see, by applying it, it is very important to our understanding of this idea.

To set a foundation for this subject, the first thing we have to understand, is that God thinks very differently to how we think. Physical, carnal, human beings often think in terms of does it feel good. God thinks long term---does it do good? We have to realize His thoughts are higher and better than ours. If there is a conflict between these two, we need to bend to what He thinks, not try to mold Him into our image and get Him to fit into how we would look at a subject. We will start off by turning to Isaiah 55 and we'll see a basic scripture that I'm sure we are all familiar with. It sets the foundation for this subject.

Isaiah 55:8 *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.*

9) *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.* (NKJV)

This is a very important thing to realize. Whenever we come to a situation where the way we would look at it makes sense to our physical minds, but is in conflict with how God looks at it, we have to realize that He is always right. Even if it doesn't make sense to our physical minds, we must not try and make Him fit into our way of thinking. We have to realize our way of thinking is wrong and His way of thinking is right. That is very important to understand. As I mentioned before, often times we are thinking in terms of does it feel good, which is how we look at things in our world. We are often looking at subjects emotionally. It is natural for us, as physical human beings to do that. Sometimes that can get in the way of us really understanding important issues.

Just to illustrate this concept, I'm going to quote from Dr. Thomas Soul. I regularly quote him in my sermons. He is a very well published author and has a doctorate in economics. He has been a professor in the U.S. and among conservative scholars, is looked on as the guru. He said this, not in terms of the Bible and doctrine and such, but more in terms of social policy. I think the concept very much applies to what we are going to talk about today.

The reason so many people misunderstand so many issues is not that these issues are so complex, but that people do not want a factual or analytical explanation that leaves them emotionally unsatisfied.

In other words, we are looking for an answer that feels right to our emotions, makes us feel good about ourselves or about our world. Sometimes that causes us to be totally blind to the facts and not see how something really is. This can really affect how we look at God's word and apply it to our world. God thinks differently to the way we think. We tend to try to make things work into how our physical, carnal minds look at a subject. Just to give you an easy illustration of this concept—this does not directly involve the main subject we are going to look at—but I want to make an easy illustration so we can see this idea. Earlier this year, I was talking to a friend of mine in the church of God and

he made an interesting observation that I totally agree with. He made the comment that we are supposed to be willing to die for the truth, but all too often these days, church members sometimes aren't even willing to be inconvenienced for it. They don't want to face anything that might cause them any personal discomfort in standing up for the truth.

Interestingly enough these can even be long-term church members, familiar with the basics of the Bible and who have been baptized for many, many years. I've seen this so many times throughout my life. They will find themselves in a situation where, standing for what they know is right—taking a stance regardless of what the exact subject is—they realize, if they do what they know is right, and what the Bible is clearly telling them, it is going to cause them some pain in their lives. It is going to cause some conflict with their family or with their friends or on their job or in other parts of their lives. Some personal pain is going to be involved. Often times what can happen is they start rationalizing for an emotionally satisfying conclusion.

God's a compassionate guy, He's understanding, He wants families to be harmonious and get along with each other. He wouldn't want me to do something that's going to cause friction in my family, He wouldn't want me to lose my job. He wants me to take care of my family and such. Then we can start rationalizing our way into something that feels emotionally right for us. But if we are asking what God's opinion is, it's not the factual analytical answer we can read right off the page of the Bible. To see an easy example of this, turn over to Luke 14. This should be a very familiar scripture. When you went through baptismal counseling—if you had any thorough baptismal counseling at all, this scripture was probably covered. I know the minister who baptized me went over it in quite a bit of detail.

Luke 14:25 *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) *“ If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

27) *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

28) *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—*

29) *lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,*

30) *saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish ?*

31) *Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

32) *Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.*

33) *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

So, would God put you in a situation where taking a stance for what you know is right could cause you a lot of personal pain? Yes, He absolutely would. If you are looking for the factual, analytical answer you can read off the page, it's really clear. There are numerous statements in that regard that are graphic examples of it. It is very clearly laid out. When we are seeking an emotionally satisfying answer, we reject the factual, analytical one which we can read off the page. We can literally blind ourselves to the truth and we start thinking in simplistic logic. You can put it in a sentence that can sound like this: That doesn't feel good therefore it cannot be true. Or it will be stated the opposite way: this feels good therefore it has to be right.

Often, we won't say it quite so bluntly, but that's the kind of thinking we can get in our head. There can be a stack of scriptures that all clearly and dogmatically say the same thing. They all agree with each other. They make the factual, analytical answer very clear and we will brush it aside and say it can't be right. And what is the reason it can't be right? It doesn't match with my physical thinking and what feels right to me. So, it just can't be right. This can literally happen to us. The way I love to put it is, scripture becomes irrelevant to the conversation. It literally just gets brushed to the side, as it just can't be right because it doesn't feel good to us. One of the subjects in our history of the church of God that we have done this with, is the subject we are talking about today.

Why does a loving Father allow His children to be stalked by a lion? Just to begin our analogy, He owns a big rifle. He's a good shot. He could take him out anytime He wants to, but instead of doing that He allows the lion to continue to stalk his children. He warns the children to be aware, constantly be aware, and not place themselves in vulnerable situations. He says if you depend on Me, I'll protect you, but if you're negligent, he's going to eat you. He allows that to happen. Why does a loving Father do that?

In our physical minds—if you're a physical father—the only reason you would allow that to happen is, if there were circumstances outside of your control that prevented you from just shooting the lion. Because that makes sense to a physical mind, what we have done in our church of God history is to make up a narrative that literally fixed that, so as to make sense to our physical minds.

What I want to do in addressing this subject is talk about this narrative of what we have done historically in the church of God. Understand it's not, in any way, my purpose to disparage anyone in the past or put anyone down. I think the mistakes we have made in the past we did out of good motives and good intentions, with the best understanding we had at the time. But to look at a subject honestly, we have to honestly take an analytical look at this. What I'm going to share with you is a basic overview of the logic on this subject that I was taught as a kid, growing up in the church of God. You will find a lot of this in church publications and literature at the time. Again, it is not my objective to disparage anybody but for us to look honestly and analytically at this in comparison to scripture. You are going to see some very flawed logic.

Here's what I was taught as a child growing up in the church. It was the idea that the plan to make mankind physical—to make physical human beings and offer them salvation—came about through a process of trial and error. The logic that was used was this. God had made the angels, and the angelic realm, but He didn't foresee anybody rebelling at that point. So, He basically did an experiment like a physical scientist would do, with all these spiritual beings, the angels. But it didn't go as He had planned it. One third of them rebelled and became His enemies and fought against Him. Next, we added another piece of logic; the idea that spirit could not die—that spirit beings could not be killed. Let me clarify exactly what I'm saying here. It is one thing to say that when God made the angels out of spirit that they are capable of living forever. The Bible clearly backs that up. However, it is a whole other issue to say that once God creates them that He can't kill them—He can bring them into the world but He can't take them out. That's basically the idea that was taught, that spirit could not die.

We also added another concept into this. The idea that Christ had to come, not just to live a perfect life and to be a sacrifice for us—the Bible clearly teaches that—but we added in the idea that He had to qualify somehow to remove Satan out of office. Notice the logic that this is creating. It's creating a circumstance in which the reason why the Father allows the lion to stalk His children is because He's not able to step in and stop this from happening. This sounds right to a physical mind, but it does not match scripture—but it sounds right to a physical mind. We had this idea that Christ had to qualify to do this. This then explains why God would allow Satan to stalk His children for thousands of years. We had this picture that He could restrain Him, He could limit Him, but He couldn't kill him. Let's examine some of this logic and dismantle it. We will see that this is very flawed reasoning.

All you have to do to see that this idea that spirit cannot be killed is to look at the example of Jesus Christ. This is an eternal God being, we know He doesn't have a beginning, He is far superior to the angels (Hebrews 1 will tell you that) but what happened here? How exactly did it take place technically, that the Father was able to reduce Him down to some form that He could be put into a human embryo and be born as a physical human being? He could live out a full life, be killed, be dead in the grave for three days and three nights and the Father has to resurrect Him. If a God being can wind up dead, why would we think an angel can't. It's not a valid concept. How we went down this road is misunderstanding one difficult scripture, Revelation 20:10

Revelation 20:10 *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (NKJV)*

We won't go into the technical details of this—Mark has addressed part of this in the last couple of months in one of the sermons. He mentioned that there was a translation error here. One of the easy ways to see that, is to notice that the word “they” is mentioned here. It says “and they” will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Pronouns only have meaning in context. You have to look at the context as to what is being addressed to understand what a pronoun is referring to. It doesn't say “he”, it's says “they”. The

“they” in this paragraph is going to be the three individuals mentioned; Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet. You know the Beast and the False Prophet were thrown in the lake of fire back in chapter 19 and they are going to be physical human beings. We know that for physical human beings the wages of sin is death—it’s not being tortured for all eternity. They were thrown in here and Satan is destroyed as well. What happens here is that they are all actually destroyed. This is stated more clearly in Ezekiel 28 in verse 17, it starts addressing Satan in about verse 11.

Ezekiel 28:17 *Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.*

18) *You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore, I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you.*

19) *All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, And shall be no more forever” ’ ”. (NKJV)*

It’s prophesying Satan’s end here. Notice he is thrown into a fire, he’s turned into ashes, he is no more forever. This is what happens to him in the lake of fire. He’s burned up, he’s destroyed. To follow my analogy in the introduction to this, at the end of the story, the Father takes the rifle, he shoots the lion, the lion is dead, He takes him out of the equation. He only does it at the end of the story when He’s done with him. We are going to see that there is a positive side and purpose as to why God has him involved in all of this. I wanted to dismantle some of this flawed logic so we can look at this subject clearly, to understand it. Then we won’t have some of these paradigms stuck in our head, cluttering up this issue.

Now let’s look at the concept I mentioned, that Christ had to somehow qualify to take Satan out of office. This probably wasn’t the terminology that was used when this was taught years ago in the church of God. But I’m going to put it into a modern-day analogy that we can relate to. It is like the idea that when God created Satan and He placed him into this role as Hillel the angel, he was a cherub. He had a really good lawyer and he got a really good contract but then he rebelled and went wrong. Now he’s got God into this solid contract and they can’t take him out of this role. They have to satisfy certain conditions and go through a loophole to be able to take him out—that’s the picture that is created. It’s a very flawed picture but that’s the logic that is presented.

We have to understand that God the Father has full authority all the time. Anyone He places into a role He can also take out. Bill Cosby used to joke years ago in one of his routines, he would talk about his father, joking with him—son I brought you into this world, I can take you out and make another one look just like you. It would appear that this is the position that God the Father is in. He created all of this, He can place people in roles, but He can take them out. Just to illustrate this point, Daniel 4, clearly states this. We’re going to start in verse 34 but let me build the context. In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had some dreams which Daniel interpreted for him. One of the things that is made very clear to Nebuchadnezzar at that point is that he was in the position

that he had, ruling the Empire with all the power he had, because God has placed him in that role. It was His will that He had allowed him to be in this role. Then later in Daniel 4, he has another dream that Daniel interprets for him and basically the warning in this one is, if you don't repent and change your ways, God is going to take you out of this role. He put you in here, He's going to take you out, He's going to turn you into a beast for seven years, and as Daniel says, if you repent, maybe He'll be merciful and extend things for you. But you are playing with fire. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't heed the warning and later he is strutting around saying, isn't this a great Babylon that I have built. I'm such a great guy and I'm so powerful. He has it in his head that He can't take me out. I'm in this role, I'm so big and bad, God can't remove me. He learned the hard way that this was not the case and God turned him into a beast for seven years. After this trial is over, we pick up in verse 34, notice the wording here.

Daniel 4:34 *And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.*
35) *All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, What have You done?"* (NKJV)

Notice he includes not just the Kingdoms of the earth but also the army of heaven. In other words, in the spirit realm and in the physical realm, nobody restrains His Hand, nobody has Him over a barrel or contractually obligated in any way where He can't carry out His will. He puts individuals in roles, He can take them out whenever He wants to—His authority is unquestioned. He has never been put in a corner where He can't act. This whole idea is very flawed. It was never a situation where God had to qualify to take him out. Yes, Christ had to come to earth and live out His perfect physical life and then be killed so that He could be the atoning sacrifice for all of us, atoning for our sins. But it wasn't an issue of Him having to somehow qualify to take Satan out of his role. God the Father and Christ placed him in this role, they can take him out anytime they want to—Satan is not in the driver's seat, that's not how this works.

There is another concept that this whole scenario is based on. It's the idea that all this came about through a process of trial and error. This whole scenario that was presented hinged on the idea that God created all the angelic realm and there was rebellion amongst one-third of them and this was a total surprise to Him. This didn't turn out well so now He has to readjust and make a change in direction. Is that what the Bible tells us? Does the Bible tell us that God does things through a process of trial and error or does it clearly tell us that He is the God who declares the end from the beginning and He brings it to pass just as He said He would in Isaiah 46:8

Isaiah 46:8 *Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors.*

- 9) *Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,*
 10) *Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,*
 11) *Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. (NKJV)*

Notice it does not present a picture of Him as a physical scientist, making a hypothesis, doing an experiment and seeing how well it turns out. Maybe it turned out the way He predicted, and maybe it didn't. Then He takes the results, readjusts and tries again—that's not how it paints the picture of God. He declares the end from the beginning. He brings it about just like He planned because He's already thought through all the options before He starts doing a plan. In Isaiah 48 and we see a very similar statement.

Isaiah 48:3 *I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.*

- 4) *Because I knew that you were ^{la}obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze,*
 5) *Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; Before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them. (NKJV)*

Notice once again, it's saying that this is the God who declares the end from the beginning. He brings things to pass as He has predicted. Just think it through—how in the world could He prophesy things thousands of years in advance in graphic detail and have it turn out just exactly as He said it would if He does things through trial and error. If He's going to start something like this and He doesn't think through a major concept such as, I could have a third of them rebel and I'm going to have to deal with that. If that's a surprise and He hasn't even considered that concept, how could He pull off prophesying thousands of years in advance and it happens exactly like He said it would. He declares the end from the beginning and He brings it about just as He said.

Does that mean He wanted them to rebel? That He wanted something to happen here? No, we're going to see there's a big difference between what He desires and what He knows will actually happen. All He had to do in this case, was understanding the concept of free moral agency. Deuteronomy 30:15 gives us understanding of free moral agency.

Deuteronomy 30:15 *See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,*
 16) *in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*

17) *But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them,*
18) *I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.*
19) *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you, life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;*
20) *that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.” (NKJV)*

Here the context is that He is speaking to Israel, He is speaking to physical human beings, but it illustrates the concept of free moral agency. If we looked at how the movie ended, with the angels, what did we wind up with? Two-thirds that chose life, one third that chose death. They had the option of obeying God, loving His way and following His instruction, whatever that was, or to choose to do something else—their own thing. It doesn't really matter what their own thing is or what their version of I want to do my own way is. It doesn't really matter what your brand of sin is or the direct path you want to go—anything that is the opposite of following Him is choosing death, it is choosing sin.

By virtue of creating the angels and giving them free moral agency, He was putting before them two paths, that of choosing right, choosing wrong, or choosing life, choosing death. He would have been very naive if He had put two paths before them and never considered that, I'm going to have two groups from this. I'm going to have a group that chooses life and I'm going to have a group that chooses death. We have to understand, that sometimes our thoughts and God's thinking are very different. Sometimes, what we want to do when that comes into conflict, is to try to make God more in our image. We want to make things into what would make sense to our physical minds and to how we think.

Sometimes I think we can unknowingly, looking a subject like this, characterize God in a way in our minds (I'm going to say this in a humorous analogy and then come back and explain it) like He is Gomer Pile. Let me explain that reference. Many of you in the audience are much younger than myself and may not recognize that particular reference. Gomer Pile USMC was a popular television show back in the 1960's. Quite frankly I wasn't old enough to have watched it on TV when it was being produced, but I watched it in syndicated reruns as a kid growing up. It was a story about a guy that grew up in a small southern town where everybody knew everybody and everybody is friendly and he grows up and joins the military. He's a goodhearted guy, he's nice to everybody, he's honest, kind, forgiving and just the most genuine hearted guy you would ever want to meet in your life. He is good to everybody, but he's also very naive. He tends to look at the world through rose-colored glasses like everyone's going to be as good and as nice a guy as he is. A lot of the humor in the show is the predicaments he gets himself into because he looks at the world through these rose-colored glasses. He is assuming everybody else is going to be as nice of a guy and is as genuine hearted as he is and

reality doesn't turn out like that. Sometimes we can characterize God in our minds by thinking He is kind of like that. That He would create all these angels and it would never cross His mind that He put two choices before them, and consequently He is going to have a group that chooses death, and that chooses to do their own thing. That's the very nature of free moral agency. We have to realize there's a difference between what God would like, how He would like things to turn out versus what He is wise enough to know will be the outcome.

2 Peter 3 illustrates that concept. What I want you to see here, is that there is a big difference between what God would like to see happen, what He wishes would happen and what He is wise enough to realize what will happen.

2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (NKJV)*

I am reading from the New King James translation of the Bible here. When it says not willing that any should perish, the way this is translated in the New Revised Standard version is, not wanting any to perish. In other words, He doesn't want anybody to choose death. He wants everybody to make it. His desire is for everyone to choose life and to follow Him and have good results—that's His desire. He doesn't desire anyone to choose death and to rebel. There's a difference between what He would like to see happen and what He is wise enough to know will happen. Just like with mankind, here's what His desire is—He wants everybody to make it into the Kingdom of God. He wants everyone to love Him and to follow Him and to have eternal life and have a successful outcome. What did Christ tell us is the reality of what will happen? Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:13 *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.
14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)*

Think about the picture that is created here. Ask any child, which is the bigger number, bigger or few. I am willing to bet most of them will get it right. They'll say many is a bigger number, because it is. It's not a difficult concept. Remember when I read the quote from Dr. Sullivan in the beginning? I said the reason so many people misunderstand so many issues, is not because the issues are so complex, it's because we don't want factual, analytical answers that are emotionally unsatisfying. That is not a difficult concept, it's an emotionally unsatisfying one. In my life, many times, in fact most of my life, growing up in the church of God I've heard this said a lot of times that God doesn't want anybody to fail. This scripture in 2 Peter is even used. God doesn't want anybody to fail, which He doesn't, He wants everyone to make it. But often times that concept gets read and then what will follow that is the idea that just about everybody makes it into the Kingdom of God. It is just the tiniest portion of mankind, just the worst of the worst, that wind up going into the lake of fire; everybody else makes it. If you study this subject in the Bible, that's not what it says. It's very clear that there is a

significant attrition rate. The Bible tells us several times, many are called but few are chosen. It gives us examples like the parable of the ten virgins. The picture there is about half and half. I'm not trying to say an exact percentage but there is a very clear trend of a significant attrition rate that's planted by the Bible. That is the factual, analytical answer that we can read from a stack of scriptures. What often happens is that we dismiss all of that and we say the narrative, no it's got to be the answer that is most satisfying. The one that makes us feel good. God's question is not about how it feels, it's about what it does. When our thoughts contradict what He says, He is always right, even if that's not emotionally satisfying for us.

To relay this back to the subject where we started, keep in mind there's a difference between what God would like to see happen, and He's wise enough to know what will happen. Of course, when He created all of the angels, did He want one third of them to rebel? Of course, He didn't. He wanted all of them to choose life. That didn't mean He was naive enough to think that was what was going to happen. You have to keep in mind that God is not Gomer Pile. Yes, He is a good hearted, a loving personification of everything good, but that doesn't mean He is naive and thinks everyone is going to make the same choices He does. Knowing this, all He had to do when starting this plan was to make millions of them and give them a choice of life or death. He knew---I'm going to have a group that chooses life and I'm going to have a group that chooses death.

Being the God that declares the end from the beginning and bringing it to pass, He has already thought through all of the options. He already knows in general, what is going to take place and He already has plans to deal with all of that. He doesn't have to specifically know each individual who is going to rebel. That will sort itself out as people's individual choices become evident. If He just understands free moral agency, He can grasp the concept that I'm going to have a group that chooses death. He then builds that into the plan of how He is going to address that. He thought all of this through from the very beginning, the very foundation of the plan. This wasn't a trial and error process where He started an experiment and says, oops I didn't see that and then starts adjusting as He goes forward. Revelation 13 illustrates this. We break into a context here addressing the beast. But that is not really where we are trying to go. I want you to see a comment made in verse 8.

Revelation 13:8 *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.* (NKJV)

Notice it's talking about Christ being slain from the foundation of the world. Of course, He wasn't literally slain until He came down as a physical human being and lived out His physical life and was crucified, to die for our sins. It says, slain from the foundation of the world—that's because from the moment they started the plan, they had already thought through the fact that human beings were going sin and were going to need a sacrifice to cover that sin, to atone for that, to allow salvation to be offered. Therefore, the plan from day one was that Christ was going to have to come and die—this was

going to have to be a part of it. He didn't put Adam and Eve in the garden and say, oops, they sinned, now what are we going to do? It wasn't a trial and error process. Just like He planned ahead for that, He also knew that He was going to have angels that rebelled and this was also going to be a part of the plan.

In my last sermon about a month ago, I built the foundation for this next scripture. I am going to very briefly summarize this. I pointed out last time that the violent nature that we see in our world today, that violent, hostile attitude that we have, comes from Satan. It tells us that he is the reason why we are children of wrath. It's easy, if you start comparing, when he's in the equation and when he's not in the equation, you can clearly see this. If you look through human history from Adam and Even in the garden to today, people are killing each other—Cain killing Abel, we have the first example of murder there—and just outright war. It is a common theme throughout human history. In fact, the exception is finding periods of peace where there was no war.

Then we have 1000 years without Satan in the equation and how is this described? A time when a nation does not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. We also have prophecies in Isaiah about peaceful neighborhoods and no crimes and things going very, very smoothly. That's because this hostile, evil, violent force is out of the equation. Then we read in Revelation 20 what happens when he is released again. Keep in mind that this is in a time frame when salvation is offered to everyone—anyone who is willing to repent and receive the Holy Spirit has the chance to do that—so even in that setting what is he able to do? Stir up a violent war. That's where this hostile, violent attitude comes from. Turn over to Luke 11—I just needed to build that foundation so you'll understand the quote we are about to read. Luke 11:46, I want you to see what was planned from the foundation, from the very beginning.

Luke 11:46 *And He said, Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.*

47) *Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.*

48) *In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.*

49) *Therefore, the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,*

50) *that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world [Same reference we just read in Revelation 13] may be required of this generation,*

51) *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.*

(NKJV)

What I want you to see is that it wasn't just Christ who was slain from the foundation of the world, He knew that the prophets were going to be murdered and slain from the foundation of the world. Why? Because He knew that when He sent them out to preach,

it was going to be a violent, hostile world that wasn't just going to reject their message. He knew that people were going to want to murder them for just teaching the truth. He was already planning on there being evil, spiritual forces involved in the equation. This isn't the God who does things through trial and error and stumbles His way through it and readjusts like a physical scientist. He is not Gomer Pile. He planned from the very beginning, exactly thought through all the options, knew exactly what He was doing and brought it to pass as He planned it. Why would He do this? That's the question we started off with from the beginning. Why does a loving Father, who owns a good rifle, who is a good shot, allow a lion to stalk His children and go after them. He warns the children, He constantly tells them, here is what you are up against; be aware, be alert, don't let yourself become vulnerable, depend upon Me for protection. I'll take care of you. But if you are negligent and you don't heed the warning, you are going to get killed and He allows that happen. Why would He let that take place? We have to understand that there's a positive side to all this. One of the keys in all of this is where we started. God's thoughts are higher than ours, His ways are higher than ours and even if something doesn't feel good to our emotions, to our physical thinking, we have to remember that He is always right. If there is a conflict, then we need to understand His thinking and not try to mold Him into our image and get Him to fit into what makes sense with our physical minds. You have to understand that there is a useful purpose in all of this, which God is utilizing. 1 Corinthians 11:17 reveals the concept.

1 Corinthians 11:17 *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.*

18) *For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.*

19) *For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. (NKJV)*

In the context, He's talking about some of the issues that were taking place there. What I want you to focus on is, that He says here, that there must be factions among you. Why? Because it serves a useful purpose of showing those who are approved. It creates a situation, just to put it in a different terminology, that separates the sheep from the goats. In other words, it shows those who are approved. It creates a situation where they show themselves by their actions, as to who is diligently trying to follow God and follow the truth and who is not. If you think of this. In the New King James, it refers to *factions*. Depending on what Bible translation you have, some will translate this is "heresies", some will translate it as "divisions" and those concepts can apply. These are obviously things God hates. God hates heresy, He hates division, He has very strong things to say about that. If you look at the same Greek word here using *factions*, you'll see it listed in the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 and in the New King James it translates it there as "heresies". These are obviously things that God is against. He's not in favor of these, He thinks these are very bad and He's very clear about that. What does He say? He says these must exist—why? Because they serve a useful purpose. They help show who is really following Him and who is not. It creates the situation that helps separate the sheep from the goats? If we understand Satan's role, this is very much what His role is about and why He is involved in the equation. This is the positive

side of Him. Realize when I say positive side, I'm not saying this evil, maniacal being that is the worst of the worst, has something good about him. No, he's rotten to the core but God is able to utilize him for a positive purpose.

Notice briefly the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4.

Matthew 4:1 *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

2) *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

3) *Now when the tempter [notice that phrase and how it's the title given to Satan] came to Him, he said, If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*

4) *But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (NKJV)*

Notice it says this was purposefully planned work. It says Satan would have a chance to tempt Christ. He came to tempt him and it refers to him as the tempter. He's the one who does this. In both cases the word *tempted* and the word *tempter* comes from the same Greek word. It's transliterated into English as *peirazo*, Strong's #3985 and the Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodiatas defines it as, "*to try to prove in either a good or bad sense, tempt, test by soliciting to sin generally in a good sense in order to ascertain the character, views or feelings of someone, in a bad sense with ill intent, hence by implication to try one's virtue, tempt, solicit to sin.*"

This is kind of like what we read about with heresy. What does it do? It shows those who are approved. It makes them apparent because it creates a situation that divides them out. This is what Satan does. He's the tempter that comes to test us. This basically proves a person's character and we just read there it can be done with good motives, and it can be done with ill motives. Obviously, Satan's motives are bad, he's trying to destroy. He's on a mission to deceive, destroy and kill. There is nothing good about his motives at all, he is rotten to the core. Why does a loving Father allow this to take place? Because He is using it as a tool and is looking at the same result, which is how this can test and show who is approved. But He is doing it with a positive motive so He can determine who is going to really love His way and stick with that way, and who He will reward with eternal life. This is the positive purpose of what is playing out here. Satan is referred to as the tempter—that's his role, to help sort this out. He's totally rotten and evil but the reason this is tolerated is for this purpose. This is something we go through to receive the crown of life.

James 1 clearly explains this.

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (NKJV)*

First, you're proved, then you receive the crown of life. What does it mean to be proved? What's this verse getting at. The Greek word translated as *proved* in English is the Greek word *dokimos*. Strong's #1384 and again from Zodiates, this is defined as "*proved, receivable, tried as metal by fire and thus be purified, hence to be approved as acceptable men in the firmness of adversity*".

Notice that this is what proves where we stand. Do we really love God's way or not? We are put to the test that determines this. Notice the order here. You are tested through the fire of adversity, then you receive the crown of life. It goes in that order. This not only serves the purpose of proving, it separates the sheep from the goats. The process also develops us with God's character. Striving against dealing with this temptation, is kind of like working out. You don't build strong muscles sitting on the couch watching TV, you go to the gym and you strive against resistance. It's the same concept.

James 1:2.

James 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials ...*
(NKJV)

That's an easy thing to say and a very hard thing to do because we generally don't think of trials as a blessing. When we get hit with a trial and it's painful, our first thought is not, I'm so blessed. It is please, make this go away. That's what my thought always is. Back to verse 2.

2) *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*
3) *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*
4) *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* (NKJV)

It's not just a process that separates the sheep from the goats, it is going through the process that develops our character and strengthens us. It helps us to become more like God, if we're relying upon Him and striving to do so. If we're negligent and don't do that, then the lion destroys us. In Romans 5, we see a very similar statement that backs up this same concept; start in verse 1.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
2) *through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
3) *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations ...* (NKJV)

Again, we don't typically as physical human beings think of tribulation as something to glory in. It's something we want to go away. This is the whole conflict between how we think and how God thinks, and remember, He is always right.

- 3 continued) ... *knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;*
4) *and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*
5) *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (NKJV)*

You have to understand, that when we go through harsh trials, when we are tempted and tested by Satan, it's not an enjoyable process, it's not something we enjoy going through. Rejoicing in a trial is probably one of the hardest things we have to do, that and loving your enemy. Those are some of the biggest trials we have as human beings because it's just foreign to how we think. The fundamental concept is, God's thoughts are higher than ours. When His ways don't match up with how we think of things, we have to remember that He is always right. When there is a conflict, we are the ones who are wrong, we don't try to mold Him into our image and make it match with the way we think. We have to realize we need to alter our thoughts to think like He does.

How does all this work? If God the Father, this loving all powerful Father, allows this lion and all his minions to be coming after us and to pursue us and is doing it for our ultimate good, how do the dynamics of this work? How does He play all this out? The key to understanding this subject is understanding the book of Job. Turn over to Job 41. Let me create a little background. I mentioned from the very beginning of this sermon that often times we, as physical human beings, think physically, we think carnally, we tend to think emotionally when we look at subjects. We are looking for the answer that is emotionally satisfying to us. Sometimes that blinds us to seeing the truth of the Bible, particularly, when God's spiritual thinking conflicts with our physical thinking. Sometimes we strive so hard to try to find an answer that is emotionally satisfying to us that we reject the factual, analytical answer that we can read off the page.

The book of Job is one of the most classic examples of how we have done that in the church of God in our lifetime. If you have been in the church of God a number of years, you probably remember that at least several decades ago the standard teaching in the church of God about the book of Job was that it was a book about self-righteousness. That was pushed so much that Job's name often times got synonymized with the problem of self-righteousness, as if he was the poster child for self-righteousness. The argument we made was really one of cause and effect. It was those trials brought upon this guy because he had this secret sin of self-righteousness. He had to go through all of these horrible trials to humble him and beat this out of him so he could become converted at the end of the book. This was all based upon the concept that bad things don't happen to good people. That is a very emotionally satisfying concept; a totally flawed one but one that feels good to human emotions. If you look at this book and say, wait, this is a guy who God Himself said multiple times was a blameless and upright man who feared the Lord and shunned evil. He is held up in the book of Ezekiel as one of the most righteous man to live and is compared with Noah and Daniel. In James 5 he's equated with the prophets and held up as one of the chief examples that we should look to. If we look this guy about whom God brags as His poster child for righteousness at the time he's living can be put through all of this, what does that mean? It means you and I are vulnerable—that's not emotionally satisfying, that's kind of scary.

What we did was create a narrative that would make it emotionally satisfying to us. It wasn't because the factual, analytical answer was so difficult, because this book gives us an example of his three friends. What do his three friends argue throughout the whole book? This is cause and effect Job. These trials are brought upon you because of all your bad sins and they then laundry listed what they thought his sins were. At the end of the book what does God say? You didn't speak the truth of Me as my servant Job did. He condemns them, he tells them to go and ask Job to pray for their forgiveness because you don't want Me to dish out to you what you have dished out; you don't want Me to deal with you according to your actions. It wasn't really difficult to look at this and go, wait a minute, we are making the exact same argument that his three friends made. God said the three friends are wrong and that means we are wrong.

That wasn't a difficult concept, it was just emotionally unsatisfying and that's why we created a narrative that would match with our physical thinking. I'm not trying to disparage anybody from the past, this is just factually what took place and we really misunderstood the subject because we were looking for that emotionally satisfying answer. When we make the mistake of doing that, scripture becomes irrelevant to the conversation. There can be a big stack of scriptures that clearly, dogmatically, bluntly say the same thing, and they all agree with each other and we can brush them aside and say no, that can't be right and the logic behind it—that doesn't feel good therefore it can't be true. That's what can happen to us, we can become totally blind.

In Job 41, I want us to see that here is the question I asked, how does all this work? How does God work all of this out, and how do the dynamics of this take place? In Job 41, God is basically putting a number of rhetorical questions to Job. He's illustrating to Job, that his trials were not brought upon him because of a cause and effect situation of his sins. However, he certainly stumbled and struggled in coping with all that had happened to him. In the process, and because he's arguing from the same perspective of bad things don't happen to good people and he wants God to justify to him, he wants to know what did he do to bring all this about? God is trying to get him to see that you just have to trust Me because I'm your Creator, I'm molding you and I'm always right and you have to follow Me and trust Me. In doing this, He is illustrating his relationship with Satan in illustrating this to Job, so He's asking a number of rhetorical questions. If you think about what He's saying, He's describing the relationship He has with Satan. The Leviathan who is being referred to, is a picture of Satan.

Job 41:1 *Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, or snare his tongue with a line which you lower?*

2) *Can you put a reed through his nose, Or, pierce his jaw with a hook?*

3) *Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you?*

4) *Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever?*

(NKJV)

He is saying he has taken Satan as his servant.

- 5) *Will you play with him as with a bird, Or, will you leash him for your maidens?*
- 6) *Will your companions make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants?*
- 7) *Can you fill his skin with harpoons, Or his head with fishing spears?*
- 8) *Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle— Never do it again!*
- 9) *Indeed, any hope of overcoming him is false; Shall one not be overwhelmed at the sight of him?*
- 10) *No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up. Who then is able to stand against Me?*
- 11) *Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine. (NKJV)*

We have here, a picture of God in total control all the time; He doesn't need anyone's permission to put anyone in a role or take them out. He has full authority to do whatever He wants to do at any time. He's illustrating to Job that Satan, Leviathan, is way more powerful than you, you don't want to mess with him, but I have him like a dog on a leash. I put a hook in his jaw, I make him as a servant, he is like My dog. I can walk him around, play him like a fiddle and do whatever I want to with him because He has taken him as a servant. When God created the angels, He knew when He set before them life and death, He was going to have a group that would choose death and He already had a plan for the group that chose death. He's going to put a hook in their jaw, take them as a servant to utilize them for His purposes. Then when He was done with that, then He'll take the rifle, shoot the lion and get rid of him. But not until He's done using him for His purposes. So how exactly does it play out? How does it work?

It's clearly illustrated for us in the beginning of this book. In Job 1 and verse 6 we are going to read two different exchanges between God and Satan which clearly illustrate exactly how God utilizes Satan as a tool in trying and testing His people. What I want you to notice as you read through this is, who initiates the whole situation, the whole conversation and who is in control the entire time. The reason I mention that is because, very often, and I've heard this language used all of my life in the church of God, when we see Satan attacking the church or attacking individuals, it's so often characterized as Satan must be extra angry. He must be all worked up. We think of it in these terms—without even realizing it—we paint a picture of Satan being in the driver's seat. It's really a question of how angry he is or how much effort he's putting into it rather than realizing that's never really the question. It is always a question of how much of the leash God allows him. He's like a dog on a leash and God can allow more slack in the leash and allow him to do more or He can pull him up tight. He is always in control the entire time; He is playing him like a fiddle.

Job 1:6 *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.*
 7) *And the Lord said to Satan, From where do you come?" So, Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."*

8) *Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"*

9) *So Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for nothing?*

10) *Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.*

11) *But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"*

12) *And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.*

(NKJV)

Notice what took place here. Notice it's God who started the conversation, it's God who said have you noticed my servant Job. He's playing Satan like a fiddle and He threw the bait out there. He knew what Satan was going to do. He immediately jumped on it—sure I'll go after him. Ok, here are your restrictions; you can only go this far, I won't allow you to go any further. God is playing him like a fiddle because He's utilizing him as a servant, as a tool. He has a purpose involved in all of this. It's not a situation where Satan is just really angry and he's attacking and God and His people are on the defensive trying to react to everything that Satan is doing. No, God is in the driver's seat the whole time.

Look over in Job 2:1.

Job 2:1 *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.*

2) *And the Lord said to Satan, From where do you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."*

3) *Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."*

4) *So Satan answered the Lord and said, Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.*

5) *But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"*

6) *And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."*

7) *So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. (NKJV)*

Once again, we have the picture of who started the conversation. It was God. God threw out the challenge. He threw out the bait, knowing Satan would jump right after it and at the same time he placed the restrictions on him. He told him how far he could go

because He is utilizing him as a servant. He has a hook in his jaw, and He is controlling the whole thing. He is allowing him to go after Job because He has positive purposes in mind.

We started off this sermon asking the question, why does a loving Father, who is all powerful and can do whatever He wants, allow a lion to pursue His children, to constantly go after them and try to kill them. But when we look at the whole subject, we find that instead of just taking His rifle and shooting the lion, He allows this to happen. He allows a situation where, if the children are negligent the lion can kill them. He doesn't think like we do, He does this because there is a positive side to the whole situation. Satan is the tempter. He is the one who creates a situation that divides the sheep from the goats, because he puts us to the test and that test proves whether we are going to diligently follow God and endure to the end or whether we are not. The process of going through this helps to develop the character of God in us. As we look at the subject, let's realize that God doesn't think the way we do. If we're just focusing on an emotionally satisfying conclusion, we will blind ourselves to understanding the truth and understanding what's really going on. We have to realize that when there is a conflict between what we think and what God thinks, God is always right. We have to mold ourselves to be more like Him, not try to mold a narrative that makes Him like us. Let's understand when we look at this subject that we have an all-powerful, loving God Who is doing all of this for our benefit. He allows a lion to do this because there is a positive side to all of this that is for our ultimate good.