

# God's Sovereignty and Your Salvation, Part 4

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After preaching twenty-eight times in twelve days [while I was in South Africa], and [enduring the] thirty-five-hour trip back, I'm almost recovered from jetlag. I'm almost sleeping [well] through the night, and I'm almost back to normal. As you will see, I'm pretty much back to normal when it comes to preaching.

Open your Bibles to Luke 10:21–24, which is our anchor text for a topical series [on] God's sovereignty and your salvation. This morning we're going to be looking at the external barriers between men and their salvation.

I'm sorry I was gone those three weeks in South Africa, but, as we come back to the text this morning, I just want to encourage you [that] if you were not here for the other three messages [on the sovereignty of God and your salvation] leading up to this one, it would be very helpful if you listened to those messages because the message this morning and the other previous messages are what are going to help us understand what we're going to talk about next week and the weeks after.<sup>1</sup> If you didn't hear [those sermons],

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<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2007/20070422>

<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2007/20070513>

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then you're going to have all these questions, and you're going to come up to me, and then I'm going to say, "Did you listen to the other messages?" and you're going to say, "No," and I'm going to tell you to do that. So, just make sure you listen to those because it will really bring a lot of clarity to what we are going to be learning.

We've covered, so far, that God saves men, [that He] is sovereign over men's salvation. We've learned that, we've seen it in the text, and we're going to read the text here in a minute, and we'll see how it is again. It is good to stop sometimes when the Bible addresses something, and not just address what is in the text, but [to also address] all the doctrines [related] to what is in the text so that you can understand what is there. This is especially true when you're talking about God's sovereignty in salvation, and predestination, and foreknowledge, and election, and how the will of man fits into that, and all of these things [that] are really complex. They're really hard to understand *if* you just look at them in an isolated way. But though they are complex and baffling to some, they are well within the reach of your average Bible student if you just listen and look at what we're looking at, then it becomes quite clear. It's amazingly so. [When I teach people slowly], I love to get to the part where we start talking about the *really* complex things, because [then people realize], "Oh, yeah. Well, that has to be that way." It becomes very obvious. But if you don't go [through the doctrines and ideas surrounding the complex doctrines], you just think, "I don't understand."

What we [did] in our first three messages [in this series] is we looked at the doctrine of man and sin. We learned that men were created in the image of God, [they were] perfect, but then they fell into sin. We talked about the image of God being two things: men have some of the same characteristics and attributes of God, and men were created to rule over the earth just like God rules over heaven and earth. So, they have some of the same characteristics, or attributes, and functions. We also learned that all men are sinners and all men are in need of salvation. We learned that all men are totally depraved, which doesn't mean [that] they are as sinful as

they can be, or that every person sins as much as they could. What it does mean is that sin has affected every part of man's being. There is no part of our being, whether it be our heart, our mind, our emotions, or [our] body, that has not been affected or corrupted by sin. That's what "total depravity" means. We learned that because men are sinners, because they are totally depraved, [sin] affects men's minds—their consciences, their hearts, their attitudes toward God and the things of God. We went to great length to explain all of this.

If you're wondering why we are going to such great pains, it's because you can't understand God's sovereignty in salvation if you don't understand these things. Let's look at the text [in Luke 10], where we will see God's sovereignty in salvation and then talk about some of those issues [related] to the grand thing in the text before us, which we will get to in several weeks. Look at Luke 10 and follow along as I read verses 21–24. (If you don't have a Bible, you can probably find one in the pew [in front of] or behind you. There should be a Bible nearby.) "At that very time He," that is, Jesus:

rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

Now, if you remember the context, Jesus has sent the seventy out to do some pre-evangelism in cities where He is going to [go later]. He has given

them the power to heal people, cast out demons, and to preach the gospel. They've gone on this evangelistic, healing, demon-casting-out crusade, and they've come back and what they're really excited about is not that people [were] saved, not that they preached the gospel, but that the demons were subject to them. They tell Jesus that, and then He tells them, "Don't be excited about that. Be excited that your names are recorded in heaven." Then He gives them an example of what He's talking about, and that is what our text says: "At that time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father.'" When Jesus begins to praise the Father, He praises the Father for some interesting things. "I praise You that You have hidden the truth from some people so [that] they can't be saved, and that you have revealed it to others so that they can." He says, "This way was well-pleasing in Your sight. And, by the way, no one knows the Son but the Father, no one knows the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the *Son* wills to reveal Him."

You see in that text a very clear statement that God is absolutely sovereign in who gets saved. But, of course, this then brings a whole bunch of questions to mind, [questions that] torment a lot of people's souls. Why would God hide the truth from some people and not others? Why would He do that? Why wouldn't God reveal the truth equally to all men? If people need God to reveal the truth to them in order to be saved, and God keeps the truth from them, then how can God judge them for not coming to salvation if the only way they can is if God gives them the truth? If God saves all He desires to save and God is not willing that any should perish [see 2 Peter 3:9], then why aren't all saved? If He does save all He desires to save, then why pray or witness? How can that be fair? How can that be just? What about man's will? What about man's choice? All of these questions then come to mind when you read a text that says, "I praise You, Father, for you have hidden the truth from some and revealed it to others." Hmm. How can that be? That's what we are going to find out.

We have already looked at man and sin and total depravity, [and] there is one more thing that I want to look at this morning, which we're going

to get into in a minute. I just want to review quickly what we have already said, because you need to get this all mounted up in your mind. We learned from (I'm not going to quote all the texts) John 3:19–20 that the wicked do not come to the Light lest their deeds should be exposed. They don't want to come to the Light because they don't want to come to the truth, or Christ, because they know they're doing evil, and they don't want their evil deeds exposed. We learned from Romans 8:5–8 that those who are in the flesh—those who don't know Christ—are hostile to God. They don't subject themselves to the law of God, Paul says, for they are not even able to do so and they can't please God.

We saw in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the natural man, or unsaved man, cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. That is, he cannot understand the Word of God because the Word of God can only be appraised if you have the Spirit of God within you. Since they are devoid of the Spirit, the text literally says that it is foolishness to them. The word “foolish” is [actually from the word for] “moronic”—they read the Bible and they think the Bible is moronic. The text says it is not only moronic to them, but it is also out of their reach in that they do not have the power, the “*dunamis*,” within them to even get a hold of the truth because it's spiritually appraised. They can't even access it.

In Romans 3:9–19, Paul gives that huge list of the problem[s] of all mankind, whether Jew or Gentiles, and he says, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” He makes it so clear that no one on their own ever seeks God, ever could understand God, ever would want to do what's right. They just don't want to. It leaves men in a very precarious position. They are just sinning, sinning, sinning, and if you think, “Why don't men just stop sinning, then?” Well, we read in Jeremiah 13:23, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do

good Who are accustomed to doing evil.” You just can’t do it. You can’t do it.

[If] you’re walking down the street, [or] you’re driving around in your car, [and] you see people on the sidewalks, you see your neighbors, you see your friends, you see unbelievers in the world, know this: Those people are lost. They’re lost and even though you may not know them, you know a lot about them. You know that sin has affected every part of their being. They love darkness rather than Light. They don’t want to come to the Light, they don’t want to submit themselves to God. They don’t want to worship Jesus, they don’t want Jesus being in control of their whole lives. They might give Him some crumbs, give Him a little bit on Sunday morning, but they don’t want Jesus controlling them. They don’t want God ruling their whole lives. They are willing to give Him a portion—maybe, some of them. When you’re thinking about that, you’re [wondering], “Well, Jack, if this is true, then how does anyone get saved? I mean, if they don’t love God, if they don’t want to come to the truth of God, if they love sin instead, if they can’t even understand the things of God, if they’re spiritually dead, then how does anyone ever get saved?”

That’s what we’re talking about, isn’t it? Everything that we’ve covered up to this point could all be categorized under one category: the internal barriers [that] keep men from coming to Christ. [They are] those things inside: your will, your thoughts, your emotions—which are all corrupted and distorted—the fact that you’re devoid of the Spirit, you love darkness rather than the Light. All of those things are things from within that keep people from coming to Christ. This morning we want to talk about those things *outside* of the unbeliever [that] hinder him from coming to Christ. Then, when we understand both of these groups and put them together, then you begin to understand why God saves men the way He does.

So this morning, I want to talk about three external barriers [that] keep men from coming to Christ [and which] must be overcome if [men] are ever going to be saved. This is huge, [but] this isn’t just pie-in-the-sky theology,

this is very practical for anyone who doesn't know Christ or anyone who knows somebody who doesn't know Christ, which is everybody.

The first [external barrier] is: Satan and demons hinder people from coming to Christ. The Bible teaches [that] Satan is a murderer, that he has been a “murderer from the beginning” [John 8:44]. [Do] you know what? He doesn't really try and get people killed physically—that's not the big deal. He knows everybody's going to die physically if he just leaves them alone, doesn't he? The death rate is still at 100 percent. But, what he wants people to do is die before they come to faith in Christ so that they die for all eternity and perish in hell. That's what he wants. Every unbeliever you know has Satan and demons working against him. Actually, the Bible [often mentions just] Satan, but [it means] Satan and all of his demons. Whenever his demons do anything, and we know there's a lot of them from the Scriptures—we covered that a while back—it's attributed to Satan because he is their ruler. What you need to realize is that when someone doesn't know Christ, Satan is working to keep him from knowing Christ. It may be your husband, it may be your wife, your daughter, your neighbor, your coworker—whoever—the cashier at the grocery store. It doesn't matter who it is: if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, if you've never been born again and transformed, Satan is playing you, big time.

Now, to see this, let's look at a few texts. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4. Again, I'm just going to give you a couple [of] sample texts for each of these categories. [Turn to] 2 Corinthians 4:3–4. Here, Paul is explaining to the Corinthians that he proclaimed the truth and he did it in an unadulterated way. He says:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Think about that. This phrase here “the god of this world” is just another reference to Satan. He is the god [of], or the ruler [of], or the one who is behind, this evil world system. It says here that the gospel is veiled to [unbelievers]. It's like [Satan is] covering their eyes. It says [that] he has blinded them. The word “blinded” literally means “to be smoked up.” That is, [it's as though Satan has] fill[ed] a room so much with smoke that people can't see. We say [that] somebody's “in a fog,” and what do we mean by that? [It means that] they don't understand, they're clueless, they can't get their mind on it, or whatever—they're just in a fog. Satan labors to keep people in a fog, in a thick, dense, smokescreen of lies and deceptions so they can't see the gospel for what it really is, and they think, “Oh, big deal. Jesus is a crutch.”

Turn to Ephesians 2[:1–2]. This is a text [that] is familiar to many of us. Paul is explaining why the Ephesians and all men need [to be] saved, and what unbelievers are like before coming to Christ. He's speaking to the Ephesians about what they were like before coming to Christ and then includes himself. He says this, starting in verse 1: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Stop there. [If] you go to the morgue, you open up the cooler, [and] you pull someone out who's dead, he doesn't respond physically does he, in any way? You can't say, “Put 'er there,” [and have him respond]. You can't go up to his toe and tickle him. You can't say, “Blink. Twitch. Breathe. Nod,” [and have him respond]. He can't do anything physically because he is physically dead. [Similarly] Paul says [that since] all unbelievers are *spiritually* dead here [in this verse], they cannot respond in any way spiritually.

He says, “You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air,” another designation for Satan, “of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” [Ephesians 2:1–2]. Paul says [that] they were walking dead men; they were spiritual zombies. I remember [as I was] growing up there would be monster movies [with] zombies popping out of the grave half-rotten, [groaning], chasing emotionally terror-

ized women, who were screaming. What can a zombie do to you? They're already half-rotten, you know? There's not much there. They're good at scaring an emotionally fragile woman, I guess. Anyway, zombies like that are fictions. They're just nothing more than fictions invented by the twisted minds of men. Physically dead people, half-rotten people, don't get up out of the grave and walk around. It just doesn't happen. However, there are such things as *spiritual* zombies. As a matter of fact, there are billions in the world. Anybody who doesn't know Christ is a spiritual zombie—spiritually dead, physically walking. That's what they are. That is why Paul says at the beginning of [Ephesians 2:]1, "You were dead," and then in the beginning of verse 2, "in which you formerly walked"—walking dead people.

Notice [that] Paul says that spiritual zombies walk "according to the course of this world," which means [that] they live in rebellion against God. Look at the middle of verse 2: "according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." The "prince of the power of the air" [is another designation for Satan]. It doesn't mean that everybody is possessed, but the Greek prepositions are very precise, and when it says [Satan is] "working *in*," it doesn't mean he's working around, or working about, or working over, or working under, it means he's working *in* them. It means exactly what it says: to be within them. Satan works *in* unbelievers to do his will, which is [to] rebel against God and His Word.

Don't think we're talking about isolated instances, here. Paul is speaking to the Ephesians about what they were all like. He even includes himself. If you look at [Ephesians 2:]3, [it says], "Among them we too all," Jews, "formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Jew, Gentile, it doesn't matter. If a person doesn't know Christ, he is dead in sins and Satan is working in him to do [Satan's] will. [These people] are spiritual zombies. [If] you look at that nicely dressed man on the corner in his business suit, or that nicely dressed woman, you see that unbelieving college student typing on his computer at the coffee shop, you

see that person [who doesn't know Christ] driving around next to you on the freeway—it doesn't matter who it is—Satan is working in him. He's working in all of them, and they don't know it. They actually think, most of them, that Satan doesn't even exist. They're so deluded [that] they don't even realize that they have this influence pervading their lives. They actually think they're in control of their own lives.

Turn to 2 Timothy 2, another very interesting text. Paul is talking to Timothy about those who are going to oppose his ministry and how to respond to them. He makes some interesting statements. He says, "Don't be quarrelsome" in verse 24, "but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged," and then he says this in [2 Timothy 2:]25–26: "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition," these people are opposing, "if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Here, Paul mentions two things that Satan does. He says that they might "escape from the snare of the devil." A snare is a noose with a trigger and a bait stick. You take the bait stick, and "swish," off you go, you're hanging upside down, you're snared. He says [that] some people have been snared, captured, by Satan's lies, his deceptions, his temptations. They're blinded from the truth, they will not submit to their Creator, Satan has them hanging by their ankles dangling over the mouth of hell, and they don't even know it and they don't even care that they don't know it.

Secondly, Paul describes them as "held captive by [Satan] to do his will," which is very interesting. As I was going [through] this, I was thinking [about how] when I was in Africa, we went to this lion park, where they have all these lions [that] they use for filming. The guy [who was giving us the tour] said, "You can't really ever train a lion. You just kind of teach him certain things and you keep your eye on him." He said, "We're going to go in the park. We've used these [lions] for movies. The really bad ones we keep fenced in a fenced area, and we'll see those at the end. They either won't get trained or we're trying to train them to not eat us." We're in this

truck, and it's got a pretty high bed and some rails on it, but basically we're probably about five feet above the ground in this truck with no windows. OK? So you could put your hand out there and troll for a lion.

We got to this fenced area and there was a ten-foot-high fence with electric fenc[ing] on it. Then [our guide] opened [the gate] up and drove through, and then closed the gate behind us, opened the other gate, drove through, and then closed that behind us. Then we drove amongst the lions. They're big. A 500-pound lion is pretty serious looking. Even when they purr it's scary. They have such a deep, resonating [growl] type of a thing, it's like, "Whoa!" You kind of want to put your arms [back] in [the truck], you know? You don't want to give [the lions] any bait hanging out there. But you realize [that] they're right there—they're six feet from the vehicle, and they could just leap up and take you out. As we were driving [in] there, [the guide said], "Yeah, these lions, don't worry about them."

[I asked], "Well, why not?"

He said, "We don't feed them in trucks like this."

I said, "OK, is that good?"

He said, "Yeah, that's good because we always come out in a bright yellow, little, short jeep-type thing, and then we feed them."

I [asked], "What do you feed them?"

"We feed them horses."

"Oh, they like horses?"

"Yeah," he said, "[they like] big stuff. Impalas and deer and stuff are too little, so they need horses and cattle. Cattle are [generally] too soft for them—they like horses and buffalo."

"OK, good, good, good. I'm glad you don't feed them in cars like *this*."

So, we were [driving], and then we stopped and [the guide] started telling us about lions. He said, "If you ever get face-to-face with a lion, you need to face him. If you run, you're dead. No one has ever run away from a lion and survived that I have ever heard of."

"Why's that?"

He said, “[It’s] because they’re the king of the beasts. [If] you run, they think, ‘Lunch!’ No animal ever stands face-to-face with a lion. No animal will ever do that. So if you ever get in a place and there’s a lion there, you walk toward it, even though you’re scared to death, and they’ll actually back down because they’re not used to anything not being scared of them.” At one point, a couple of the lions were circling around to the back of the rig and [the guide] actually got out [of the truck]. There were six lions there, and he was little. I mean, he was about five-foot-four and probably weighed 140 pounds.

I thought, “Oh, great! I’m going to have to drive the rig back through the fence!” Anyway, he got out and kind of shooed them away from the rig, and [I was] just thinking, “Whoa!”

Later, we went into this one fenced-in area where some of the ornery lions were. It was about six feet wide and there was kind of a gravel pathway with these fences on both sides with electric wires [on them]. [The guide] said, “Yeah, [there’s] one neat thing to do here. We always come in here in groups, [and] if there’s a brave little kid, I say, ‘[Do] you want to do something scary?’ And the little kid will say, ‘Yeah!’ I say, ‘Just run to the end of the path,’ and as soon as the lions see the little one depart from the herd, they rush the fence and slam into it. It’s pretty fun to watch.”

[I was thinking], “Yeah, fun for *your* kid!”

That’s what Satan does: He catches us in his lies and his deceptions. He feeds [unbelievers] like those lions are fed until pretty soon they’re trained by the pleasures and lusts of this world, and pretty soon they end up doing what the master wants them to do. That’s what people are like: they are held captive by Satan to do *his* will, not God’s will.

So, Satan and his demons are working to keep people from Christ. [The second external barrier is]: Evil men hinder other people from coming to Christ. As we’ve just learned, Satan is working in the “sons of disobedience.” They are called the “sons of disobedience” because that is what characterizes their lives. Sin is their master; Satan is their master, their lord,

[and] their “god is their appetite” [Philippians 3:19]. Evil men make up the second great external barrier [that] keeps people from coming to Christ.

There are lots of examples of this in the New Testament, but I’m just going to read a couple of texts from Acts. This is the early Church, [and] Paul the apostle, who is one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived—if not *the* greatest evangelist—is out doing ministry, and this is what it says in Acts 13:45: “But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.” So Paul is preaching and then these [unbelievers] who were angry were being used by Satan to oppose Paul so that he [couldn’t] preach the gospel, which people need in order to be saved. Later, in Acts 13[:50], we read: “But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.” Here we see some unbelievers [were] inciting other unbelievers to oppose Paul so they drove him out so [that] people couldn’t hear the gospel.

In Acts 14:2, we read: “But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.” Here we have people who were instigating a riot against the believers. They were being used by Satan to oppose the gospel. Then in [Acts 14:19], it says: “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” Here the Jews not only were opposing Paul and Barnabas, [but] they [had] actually followed them to the next city, created a riot, [and] they stoned Paul and [dragged] him outside the city, thinking he was dead. Now, just think about this. What if you knew [that] every time you shared the gospel you were going to be stoned. That would put a damper on things, wouldn’t it? You would really think. I mean, it’s hard enough to share the gospel with somebody who’s smiling behind [a] counter, but to share the gospel knowing that they’re after you, that they want to kill you, that is a whole [different] thing. Satan uses men to put fear into those who know Christ

and to put fear into those who are interested in knowing Christ so that that doesn't occur.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 11. Here's another example. [In this chapter, there] were men who were opposing Paul's ministry at Corinth when he was away. Notice how Paul describes them, these men—evil men—who are being used by Satan to oppose the Apostle Paul. He says, starting in 2 Corinthians 11[:13]:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.  
[11:13–15]

Here, Paul makes it clear that Satan raises up false apostles—false teachers, deceivers, those who say they are righteous, but, in fact, are wicked—to infiltrate the church to teach error to those who are seeking Christ so that the truth does not get to them. Just think of a chessboard and moving chess pieces around. The chess pieces don't know what's going on—they're not alive. [Similarly], people who don't know Christ are spiritually dead and Satan just moves them around on the board of his game and uses them for his own means, and they don't even know it.

Turn to one other text. This is 1 Thessalonians 2, [where] Paul is describing how men have hindered the gospel ministry among the Thessalonians as he tried to preach to them so they could be saved. He says this in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16:

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the

prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

Here [Paul] says [that] the Gentiles were opposing [the Thessalonians] just like the Jews opposed [him and Barnabas]. Man, he makes some scary statements, [saying that to] anybody who tries to hinder anybody else from hearing the gospel, who hinders the proclamation of the truth of the gospel, wrath—the wrath of God—will come upon that person to the utmost. The whole point is this: There are evil men out there who are pawns of Satan, and those evil men are being used by Satan to keep those who don't know Christ from coming to Christ and to keep those who are preaching Christ from preaching Christ.

The third external barrier [is]: The world, its lusts, and its temptations keep people from coming to Christ. Do you ever wonder why an alcoholic or drug addict just keeps drinking himself sick [or] taking drugs though it is frying his brain and ruining his liver? Do you ever wonder about that? It's like, "Man, what is wrong with you? Stop it!" Why do they keep going back, time and time again? Why don't they stop? The world calls it a disease, an addiction, [but] the Bible calls it slavery to sin and Satan. That is the biblical term.

Let's say you came over to my house and we were going to build a little shed behind the garage or something. [You are] pound[ing] in some nails, and all of a sudden you whack your thumb. Ow! Does that hurt, or what? I've done that multiple times. The worst time I ever did it, I was building a wall. We were lining up the studs, and I was pounding the nails into the top plate. I started a nail, and I was really laying into the nail, and there was a guy at the other end who thought he'd shift the top plate over, so he hit the end of it right when I was coming down, and oh, man, I whacked my thumb. It was instantly blue [under the nail], and blood shot out [of it].

I was like, “Ahh!!” That hurt. My first thought was, “I never want that to happen again.”

Now, what if you came over to my house and you whacked your thumb, and then you said, “You know what? I think I’ll hit it again.” Something would be wrong with you.

It’s like, “*What?*”

“Yeah, not only am I going to hit my thumb, I think I’ll whack my wrist, and my elbow, and my head.” Why would you ever do that? Why would you beat yourself up with a hammer? Well, why do people smoke cigarettes when it says right on the package [that] it’s going to kill you? [Do] you ever wonder about that? Is that a mystery? [Smoking is] one of the number one leading causes of death in the world. Why do people take drugs when they know that [it] is going to be hazardous to them? Why do people indulge in sins though they know it will kill them? It’s because they’re enslaved.

Turn to Romans 16:18. This is the very end of the book of Romans. Paul is getting ready to discuss why false teachers do what they do, and he says this in verse 18: “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” Notice what is their lord, what they’re enslaved to: their own appetites, their own desire for pleasure, to have their lust fulfilled. Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3:18–19, [which] is very similar. He says:

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Who is their god? [It is] their appetite for pleasure. The reason people don’t hit their thumbs multiple times on purpose is because there’s no pleasure. But I’m telling you this, if you could hit your thumb and there could

be this great pleasurable sensation before it started hurting and throbbing, there would be a lot of people who would beat their thumbs completely off. You know it! They would do it just to get that pleasure. And, you [ask], “Well, why would they do that?” [It’s] because they are slaves of their sin, their god is their appetite, [and they] lust for pleasure. They want pleasure so badly they’re willing to die to get it. To some, [that pleasure is] drugs, to others it’s sex, to others it’s food, to other’s it’s alcohol. Whatever it is, people who don’t know God cannot break away from [it].

They may even say, “I’m not taking drugs anymore,” [but] then they just [get] sucked into something else. They’re out of control. They’re slaves. Though different unbelievers are slaves to different worldly lusts, they’re all enslaved to some lust. Money is a huge one, a *huge* one. People destroy themselves for money. Paul speaks of this in 1 Timothy 6:10, where he says: “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” [You could] picture those who love money as leaping off of a building onto a big bed of iron spikes and impaling themselves.

We’ve all seen [this type of thing] before. You’ve seen it in the paper. Some little, cute starlet shows up, she gets her first gig, [and] she’s really popular, everybody likes her. She’s in the movies, she’s singing, whatever, and then what happens? Well, they give her another gig and she makes more money, and pretty soon all [of] the entertainment moguls look at her like a cash box. They say to themselves, “You know what? Let’s get her to do this. If she’ll just do this and compromise a little bit here, we’ll give her a little more money.” So then she compromises her morals, and her lust for her own riches, her own fame, her own glory, drive her on as [the people making money off of her] try to drive her on, and pretty soon you read about her immorality, her promiscuity, her recent trips to the drug rehabilitation center, [and] her multiple divorces. She has everything she’s ever wanted, and it’s killing her, and she wants more. Is that insane? That is insane! Yet people don’t even know what’s happening. [They think] it’s what they want.

Paul says to Timothy [in 1 Timothy 6:10], they “have wandered away from the faith,” which means [that] some of them are in the church. Some of them are religious for a time. Maybe they go to Bible studies, maybe they hang around Christians, and come to church, and read their Bibles, maybe they even serve in a ministry for a time. Then they wander away from the faith. In 2 Timothy 4:9–10, Paul is rotting in prison, right before his execution, and he writes to Timothy, and he says, “Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” The Apostle Paul is in prison, and [you find out in various places in] the New Testament [that] he took Demas with him. [Paul] disciplined [Demas], he hand-picked him, he taught him the truth, he modeled the truth, he suffered for the gospel in front of Demas, and when he needed Demas the most, Demas said, “Listen, I want pleasure. I’m out of here,” and [he] walked away from the Apostle Paul.

The world held out its golden bait, and said, “Do you want it?”

Demas said, “Yeah.”

The world, with all of its pleasures, and riches, and temptations, is the third great barrier outside of every unbeliever that keeps him from coming to Christ.

I want you to turn to one more text—we looked at this a couple years back—Luke 8. Do you remember that? Can you remember that long ago? I want to show you [this] because this is just marvelous here, it’s amazing how when you study the Scriptures how Jesus’ teaching is just so incredible. In Luke 8:5–8 is the parable of the soils. We don’t have time to go into it in any detail, but if you remember, some seed was sown [on] the road, right? Some was sown among the rocks, and some was sown among the thorny weeds that grew up around it, and then some was sown [in] the good soil.

Right after Jesus gives the parable, the disciples ask Him for help in understanding it. Start[ing] in Luke 8:10 and following, Jesus says: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” [That] sounds like Luke 10, right? [It’s] exactly like Luke 10. It’s almost

like God is sovereign in salvation. “To you it has been granted,” He says, “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” It sounds very similar to the text we just read in 2 Timothy 2: that “God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” God has to grant it.

Jesus interprets the parable [for the disciples] in Luke 8:11–12, say[ing] this: “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God,” so you sow the word of God, you preach the gospel. “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.” Did you see that? That’s the first barrier we looked at, isn’t it—Satan and demons working to keep men from coming to Christ? Jesus has it right there [in] the first example—the seed sown [on] the road.

Look at [Luke 8:]13: “Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.” Matthew’s gospel says [that] it is because of the temptation to fear men, it is because of affliction and persecution, which arise because of the Word, or the gospel, that they go, “Oh!” and they fall away from Christ. The temptation here is the temptation to fall away because of the persecution of evil men. That’s the second barrier we saw—evil men keep people from coming to Christ.

Finally, look at [Luke 8:]14: “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” This is the third barrier: the world, with its pleasures, its lusts, [and] its temptations. Jesus includes all three external barriers, which are outside of people [and] which hinder them from coming to Christ.

Get this in your mind. What hope is there for unbelievers to ever come to Christ if they’re totally depraved, if they’re corrupted in every part of their being, if their heart is desperately sick and deceitful above all else [see Jeremiah 17:9], if their consciences are defiled [see Titus 1:15], if their reasoning is twisted, if they don’t come to the Light because they love darkness rather than Light because their deeds are evil [see John 3:19–20], if they’re

spiritually dead and they can't even understand the gospel if they heard it because they can't understand the things of God [see 1 Corinthians 2:14]? Not only that, Satan and demons are working to keep them blinded [to] the truth. Not only that, you [also] have evil men, [who] are Satan's pawns, [who] are keeping them from coming to know the truth by both persecuting those who are preaching the gospel and hindering those who want to hear the gospel. Not only that, you have the world with all [of] its pleasures and temptations, and sins baiting them, drawing them away from the truth so that they don't want to come to Christ.

The fact is [that] it is like people who don't know Christ are buried doubly deep in a concrete vault, in a bronze welded casket, and Satan, and demons, and evil men are standing on the gravesite ready to fight anybody who tries to come close. How in the world is that person going to be dug up, [have] a hole jack hammered in that vault, the coffin whipped up out of there, [and have] a torch to cut the lid off of it so [that] light can get to that corpse? How does that ever happen? How can anyone ever be saved? Come next week [and] you'll find out because that's what we're going to find out next week. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for being able to go slowly through the doctrine of salvation, to see what a desperately fretful and serious condition unbelievers are in. We have all been there at one time. Maybe some here are still there—they don't know Christ, they don't love Christ, they aren't living for You, they're blinded from the truth, they're held captive by Satan to do his will and they don't even know it. Father, I pray right now by Your grace that You would open up their hearts to the truth, that You would just make the scales fall from their eyes that they would see that they are sinners and they have sinned against a holy God and they deserve to be judged because of it. May they look beyond that to Christ, who, out of love, died on the cross, bore the sins of the world, was buried, and rose again on the third day. May they realize that through faith in Him they can receive the free gift of eternal life. Father, may they do that now. For the rest of us as we leave here today, may we remember just how desperate a situation it is when someone doesn't

know You, and how hopeless and helpless people are if it were not for Your grace. And, Father, may we return next week to find out the beginning of how You save those who are really beyond saving. And, Father, we want to give You all the glory for what we've learned and what we're going to learn, in Christ's name, Amen.

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