

Satan's Strategy to Accuse And Paralyze You With Doubt

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: He says, "I just finished watching the video, 'Don't Justify Yourself While Walking in Darkness.'" And I trust that was probably a message that I did from the 1 John series. "It came to me after I felt urges to preach on a bus in Toronto but was too afraid of men to get up and preach. I wondered if it would be effective. I know my mom tells me not to publicly preach to the general public of strangers since it's likely to be counter-productive. Yet, I felt the urge so strongly and this video came up when I was justifying myself for not preaching. So I'm wondering what I should do. Should I disregard my mother's words and bus preach? Should I find a way to preach that's not on a bus even though that wasn't my urge?"

Discussion: Now, if that was all there was, maybe James wouldn't have even sent it to me. And if that's all there was, (incomplete thought). I only get a fraction and I can't get to all of them. But it's this next thing that he says, "I feel like I've shipwrecked my faith through this and other recent events. I haven't been weeping and wailing and crying out to God, but just now after your video. It was a quiet and small cry of me not wanting to be distant and condemned, and to not want to obey God in the future when I have the chance to pursue Him and be in service to Him."

I just got to thinking... I think this kind of thing happens on a regular basis. Somebody's going along through life. You may be a Christian. You may not be a Christian. You may think you're a Christian. You may be somebody that's just not certain. But what happens is you get this almost like a flash of lightning across your conscience that you need to do something. And then you don't do it and then like an equal flash of lightning across your conscience: you're condemned. That, I believe, is typically the way the devil operates.

And I fear that this happens on a regular basis and people take it for being the Lord. And what it is is you're walking along through life and suddenly it's like this really hard thing, this really uncomfortable thing - sometimes it's just a matter of something that would be convenient in your life or something that you're just about ready to do and it's almost like a flash: bang! Maybe more like thunder than lightning across the conscience. Just bang! Don't do that! And it's the kind of thing where either you disregard it and then the next boom of thunder is, well, you've made shipwreck. Now God doesn't want anything to do with you. Now you can't approach the Lord. It's all over. And I think that happens a lot. I think it's one of the strategies of the devil and I want to talk about this because I think it is very prevalent. I think it's prevalent.

Look, that's not to say that as Christians, obedience is not part of what it is to be a Christian. To be a Christian is to submit to Christ as Lord. But the thing is this, when God wants us to do something, do you know what I have found? I have found He deals with us far more like He dealt with Jonah, where there's this call, there's this pressure. And we can even run pretty far,

but the thing is, he's going to move us back. He's going to move us back. Yes, it may be through things in the conscience, but we become convinced to where we can hear the Lord's voice in it. I'm afraid of things like this. And when I hear that, I think if I remember right, Mason Vann may have bought this book for me. Or he told me about it. But I want you to hear something. This is one of the most helpful books that I have found. It's called "Towards Spiritual Maturity," by William Still. I think maybe you even pronounce it "steel." Not positive there. But one of the most helpful, descriptive books on just such occurrences.

Listen to what he says: "We need to be forewarned of Satan's attacks when we enter the training school for spiritual warfare. For they usually come suddenly and from the least expected quarter. It may be an inward attack or it may come from without as a bolt from the blue to demoralize us before we know where we are. It's a real enemy we're fighting who will stop at nothing to knock us out of the fight before we're in it."

So, now, this man is writing from his own experience. He went through situations where he's encountered just such similar events to what this guy has experienced. (incomplete thought) He says, "the attack upon our personal moral integrity is a serious one, and the devil successfully repulsed, may now retire to devise new and more cunning tactics against us. If he cannot shake our moral convictions or undermine our moral character, he has other weapons in his diabolical armory and will doubtless try more powerful means to move us in the hope that he may shatter our peace of mind."

And that's what happens. That's what happens when you get this kind of situation is it entirely takes you out of peace with the Lord and rest. That's what he wants. And he says, "he may now assail us with a sense of restless foreboding and with irrational fears until we seriously doubt God ourselves and in fact everything that is good. All joy goes out of life. Nothing seems to matter. A vague, gnawing, cynical dread underlies all we formerly thought secure. The whole world begins to heave, turn like an ocean, giant plunging to its doom. These are not ordinary feelings of unhappiness. Indeed, they can be so enveloping and total that it's hard to believe they're real, but they're only too real. Yet they seem so unlikely that it's impossible to talk about them." Because people would not understand. And sometimes people don't understand if they haven't actually experienced this. "Not many understand, although many suffer. But God who permits them understands, and He has a word - several words for them. Here is one who's bedrock dependability has been proved for ages by those in dire need. 'You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.'" That's a good one. Here's another word from Paul. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests be known to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And again, "And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

And anyways, he goes on to say this: "God is not going to let us (not His children) be overwhelmed by the devil. It's well to remember that when we are tried and tempted to resign

ourselves to the darkness of defeat, the enemy also may be almost played out." Now I want you to follow that truth. Hear what he's saying. Sometimes when you feel like you can't take it anymore, whatever kind of battle you're in with the devil, you need to recognize he may have expended himself to the point where he almost is ready to flee and give up. Because God's holding you up. And God's not holding him up. He's only working in his raw power - whatever he's got natively. You're being supported by the living God Himself. He will make certain that you are able to outlast the devil. And just when you think you may not be able to go any longer, the devil may be right on the verge of himself giving up. That's a very encouraging thought. I put brackets and "yes!" "He must and will because we're trusting in Him who has vanquished the devil once and for all. Jesus' own heart rending cry was just before the end. What devilish pressure was laid upon Him we do not know, but it was for the joy set before Him that He endured what He endured. You remember, the devil is not invincible. He's more easily shaken by those in Christ than we realize."

But he goes on to talk about the fiery darts. He says, "What does the imagery of the fire-tipped dart represent in experience? A series of sudden, totally unexpected attacks, usually very different from one another, aimed at shaking our faith in God. Aimed at making us shake at the revealed Word and His will to His children in our judgment, obedience, and sincerity."

He goes on to describe some of these things. Listen. "Here's a story of a tried and trusted servant of God." He says, "A young man intent on serving God had begun to prepare for Christian service. He had a happy nature with a normally healthy outlook on life. He'd become increasingly obsessed with the morbid suspicion that to be too happy was sinful. One day, he saw something he wanted in a shop window and he went in to buy it. The shopkeeper appeared and instantly the inward tyrant hissed, 'You cannot have it! It's sin!' Dumbfounded at the violence of the warning, at the shock to his conscience, this young man fled from the shop leaving the astonished shop keeper gaping." It's that kind of situation. Suddenly, bang! You can't have it. Another part of the story concerns a university grant - same young man. He was faced with getting a grant for going to college. "Financial assistance was not easy to come by then and the young man's parents were not able to finance his education, but he was assured he would receive a grant and was about to sign the application form when the sinister voice spat out, 'You cannot do it. It's sin.' Several years of financial aid were thereby unsigned away leading to years of hardship. This form of attack came with increasing frequency and ferocity until a sane and balanced young man became almost demented not only by the unpredictableness, but by the horrid discovery that the God he had believed to be so loving was really a monster. It's all very well to say that Satan's bluff should have been called earlier by this young man, but he is a spirit and when he comes in this way, the young Christian - especially those with no teaching on the workings of evil spirits - the very force of the attacks is frighteningly impressive and his victims are driven to comply in sheer terror lest they be found to be fighting against God Himself."

You see, that's what he's telling you. "If you do this, you're going against God." "If you don't do this, you're going against God." You see, this is what's happening. Here's a guy. All of a sudden, here you are on a bus and it can come with the same thunderous clap to your conscience.

Stand up right now and preach to this bus or you're not a Christian, you're going to go to hell. Stand up right now and do this or Christ wants nothing to do with you. And then you get off and you feel guilty. And what you feel like is you've gone against God. You feel like you've just fought against God. He says, "As this form of attack developed increasingly in the young man's life, his early ministry was periodically overwhelmed by a pall of spiritual darkness completely enshrouding his soul. He had to preach the Word even while the black conviction gripped him that he himself was lost - a Christless soul."

See, the same thing happened to him. The voice was there. This is what Satan does. He comes in. He says, "do it!" And then when you don't do it, he says, "You don't belong to Christ." He's an accuser that way. "Eventually, although it took years, the ground comparatively innocently conceded to the enemy was retaken, albeit with painful failures and setbacks until at last there was full deliverance." Obviously, it's Mr. William Still himself. "It is the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the attacks which are so alarming. As also, the imperious demand that the spirit is to be obeyed instantly without question and without reason." And that's the issue. No time to consider Scripture or what's right or what's wrong or what probably is God's will. No time to pray. No time to seek the Lord. None of that. "It comes without reason." He says, "how then are we to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of Satan? We know, of course, that God can give His servants swift guidance, but He never blitzes them. He has no need. For even when He comes suddenly, He is sweetly reasonable and identifies Himself by His loving wisdom and thus we recognize Him."

Of course, this goes on and I want to come back to this. I guess the thing is, he feels like after this happened, he feels like I've made shipwreck. This guy went on preaching just thinking I'm probably lost because of the things that were happening. Here's the thing, we find in Scripture that the strategy of the devil is to move us away from the simplicity that is in Christ. He doesn't want us resting in Christ. He doesn't want us trusting Christ. He doesn't want us communing with Him, fellowshiping with Him, calling upon Him. He doesn't want that. And if he can come with these kind of barrages and convince us Christ wants nothing to do - it just so paralyzes you. It so sucks the joy out, if you don't know how properly to fight.

But one of the things that we need to really ask ourselves is what is God like? I mean, what is God like when He comes? Do we really have a God who even if He wanted you to preach on the bus, do we have a God who's in the business if I got up and I walked off the bus and I didn't preach, who would abandon us, leave us, forsake us, damn us? Have nothing to do with us after getting up and walking off the bus one time? And as I mentioned before, isn't Jonah the perfect example of the kind of God that we have? In fact, I want us to think for a moment. When we hear God being described in the Old Testament, think - think. Moses said, "Show me Your glory." And do you remember what God did? When His glory passes by, He speaks. And what does He do? He proclaims His character. And what is His character? What is one of the oft repeated characteristics of God then and periodically throughout the Old Testament? That God is slow to anger. He's slow to anger. Do you think that if God really wants us to become a preacher on buses that He's going to be done with us and angry with us? Be rid of us and damn

us to hell? And cause us to shipwreck on the rocks after one time? Is that the way the Lord works if He's calling us to that kind of ministry? I've watched men that are called into the ministry. I've never seen God blitz them with thoughts that in a moment they simply had to get up and run to the pulpit. I've never seen that happen. Ever. In fact, I would be absolutely convinced that that was no way of the Lord that that should happen.

Somebody open up and read Jonah 4:2. Because this isn't about Jonah, this is what Jonah knew to be true of God when he was considering Nineveh. This is the kind of God we have. And Jonah knew the kind of God we have, not only from his own experience, but because he knew the character of the God of Israel. And what does he say in Jonah 4:2?

"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Oh Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.'"

Tim: After all the wickedness that Nineveh did - you can do research on ancient Nineveh and find out their crimes, their wickedness, their sin. They filleted people alive. They did horrible things. I mean, they had ways of peeling the skin off people as slowly as possible without actually killing people. They were brutal. And here's Jonah. And this is even before Jonah gets thrown in the water, taken by the fish, spit out on the land. You see, he's saying, I knew it when I was all the way back there at home before I tried to flee. God, the reason I ran in the first place was because I knew the kind of God You were, and You sending me over there to Nineveh, I just knew it! You were sending me to proclaim judgment, but I knew that You would be soft towards them in the end because You're the kind of God that is so slow to anger and You are full of mercy. I knew it! And see, here it is! You spared them!

Now, we laugh, but that is glorious! That's the kind of God we have. You see, you look at a guy that as we walks off the bus, and his conscience is feeling condemned - see, that's what he needs to hear. The devil's right there to tell him that God isn't like that at all; that God is the kind of God that will blast you into oblivion because you didn't get up and preach when this blitz came across your conscience, but that's not the kind of God we have. In fact, the kind of God that we have, when you get to the end of Romans 10 - somebody open up to Romans 10, and I want you to read Romans 10:21. Because this is what the New Testament sees to be true. The Apostle Paul. Romans 10:21,

"But concerning Israel He says, 'All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'"

Tim: You know what I've been reading? In high speed fashion, I have read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and I'm now a fair ways through Exodus. (incomplete thought) See, what's interesting about those books is those are the books that are leading up to the captivity, the Babylonian exile. What's so unusual about that? I'll tell you. Just this. When the people were brought out of Egypt, they were stiff-necked. They rebelled. A whole generation died in the

wilderness. They got brought into the country, into the land of Canaan, and as soon as Joshua and those of his generation were gone and the time of the judges came in, everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes. They went and made Saul king, and they rejected God. They rejected the prophets again and again and again. They went after foreign gods. They went after the Baals. They went after the Ashtoreths, they went after the gods of all the different countries. What is interesting is when you get all the way down to right up to the captivity, when God has extended His long-suffering to them, do you know He was still saying - Jeremiah was there when Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered before him. His eyes were put out. He was put in chains and led off to Babylon. And the whole city was burned. He was there. He was there when the last group went into captivity. And somebody open your Bible to Jeremiah 18. Jeremiah 18:8 This is a text that stands out to me on a regular basis. Jeremiah 18:8. Somebody read that when you find it. Jeremiah 18:8,

"And if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it."

Tim: There it is. Right at the end. They're being told Jeremiah is speaking to the king right up at the end. (incomplete thought) They're told if you will even now repent, the city won't be burned. All this evil that God has prophesied will happen to you won't happen. And as I came home this afternoon, I was thinking about this message, and the two words came into my mind: even now. And I thought, yeah, where is that? I need to run to my Bible Works and find out where is that. Look at these two texts. Somebody look at Ezra 10:2 and somebody else Joel 2:12. Those two words: even now. What does that mean? What does that communicate? After everything that you have done, even now if you will turn to the Lord, He will have mercy on you. That's the kind of God we have. Even now. Look at those two texts. Now think about this. After everything that Israel did, after despising the prophets, after going off into Babylonian captivity, and then they came back, and they started taking advantage of the poor again. They started taking people into slavery. And you know what else they did? They started taking foreign wives. You remember that? But look at this. Somebody have Ezra 10:2? What does it say?

(from the room) I have NIV version. "Then Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra: 'We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us, but in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel.'"

Tim: Right, anybody have the ESV?

"...But even now, there is hope for Israel in spite of this."

Tim: See, that was it - "even now." What does it say in the KJV? Even now? Yet now. See, that, to me - we're talking centuries of rebellion. Centuries of rebellion that have been so aggravated that God actually sent Gentiles to tear the temple down to the ground, to drop the walls of Jerusalem, burn the houses. They took the bones of the kings and they scattered them. They killed he said how many of them? Only just a few, only a remnant actually lived. The vast

majority were killed with the sword. They were killed with pestilence and they were killed with famine. And after all of that, then they come back and they run back to disobeying God. And it's like you would think that's it. It's all over. And it's like God is so long-suffering... what we don't want to do is take that for granted. That, well, He's so long-suffering that in the end, He won't actually pour out His wrath, because we see that He does. There is a point at which He runs out of patience. But amazing! Joel - read Joel.

"Yet even now declares the Lord, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and He relents over disaster."

Tim: Even now. I would have a young man like this remember those two words. Even now. I mean, the God he's got conjured up in his mind - remember what he said as a young man? He said what was happening to him was the god he thought was God suddenly he began to see was a monster. But He's not a monster. He's the God who says, "but even now..." If you start thinking God's a monster, be sure of this, you're not seeing God right. And the devil is right there. Yes?

(from the room) I think of Romans 2:4 that says God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. You can kind of see that in v. 12 here. "Return to Me with all your heart..."

Tim: Our God is sweetly persistent. And what I mean by that is generally, He doesn't come like a blitz. There's a suggestion and sometimes it's subtle. And then it tends to increase and it tends to increase. And we begin to ponder Scripture and it's like we're in Scripture and He speaks again in the Scripture. And then maybe one of the brethren is used to say something. And it's like a case is being built, but He's using God's people, He's using God's Word, you're in prayer and He comes and He's convincing you to the point where you get to the place where you recognize: I know this voice. This is the Lord's voice. That's the way He deals with people. So we need to beware when this kind of thing happens that being on a bus and thinking you were told by God that you needed to stand up and preach right in the midst of the Greyhound or the city bus and you don't do that and you get off that you've made shipwreck of the faith. That has devilish overtones to it. Yeah, we do need to recognize, remember what Jonah knew. Our expectation should be this. We knew somebody was going to get saved. We knew somebody was going to be forgiven. We knew people were going to be shown mercy. Because that's the kind of God we have.

Listen, we have the kind of God that didn't even spare His own Son, but gave Him up to rescue sinners. That's the kind of God we have. If we have that kind of God and He gave His Son, do you think He's going to exercise a little bit of patience towards us? Be certain of it. And I'll guarantee you this, if God wants you preaching on the bus, don't think, oh, well, I resisted that urge one time and now He's going to dash you against the rocks of damnation. I guarantee you this, if God wants you preaching on a bus, He's going to get you to preach on that bus. You will

come to the place where you will need to. Remember Jeremiah. There were times when he got to the place where it's like I'm not going to speak anymore. Then he said I've got to. Why? Because it was a burning inside of him. It was a pressure inside of him. It was like a pressure cooker and he couldn't help himself. It wasn't this wild flash of conviction on his conscience. It was a burning in his bones. It was a necessity. Like a woe is me if I don't proclaim the Gospel or these judgments. Okay, anything else on that one? Let's go to the next one.