

Series: *Satan's If vs. God's Amen*

Title: "Satan's If vs. God's Amen – Part One" (Psalm 119:89-96)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/24/2011

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Introduction

As we search the pages of Scripture we find that the Devil has one basic method that he always uses against Christians. That method is to cause us to forget that God and His Word are all-sufficient. Satan's method is to cause us to doubt God.

As we look at the pages of Scripture, and as we look at the church in our own day, we find that one of Satan's most common ways of causing us to doubt God's Word is what I will call the implied lie. The implied lie often contains the little two-letter word "if".

But in contrast to this, I want to remind us of the polar opposite that we find in the Word of God. On the one hand, we find Satan constantly using the little unsettling word "if". But on the other hand we find great comfort, great assurance, and great power against the evil one, in the fact that our God and His Word proclaim not an unsettled "if" but a firmly settled "Amen".

So I want to begin by reading for you Psalm 119, verses 89 through 96. If you are able to do so as you are listening, I trust that you will follow along in your own copy of the Scriptures. Psalm 119, beginning at verse 89:

89. Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven.

90. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.

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91. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants.
92. Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.
93. I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.
94. I am Yours, save [or preserve] me; for I have sought Your precepts.
95. The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies.
96. I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

The passage we have just read is a great testimony to the all-sufficiency of God. And the all-sufficiency of God is rooted in the Word of God. This passage is a testimony to the nature of the Word of God, and to the nature of the God of the Word.

The nature of the Word of God is that it is the settled Word. The Word of God is unchanging and unchangeable.

And the nature of the God of the Word is that He is absolutely faithful to His Word. The God of the Word is, likewise, unchanging and unchangeable.

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The all-sufficiency of God is rooted in the all-sufficiency of His Word.

The passage we have just read is also a testimony to the insufficiency of man. The insufficiency of man apart from God, and apart from His Word. And so this passage is a testimony to our need to rely, absolutely, upon the Word of God and upon the God of the Word.

We need to rely absolutely upon the Word of God because of our internal struggles, the struggles of the heart and the mind. Without Your Word, the psalmist says, "I would have perished in my affliction." That word that is translated "affliction" in this verse speaks of an inward poverty and misery. The internal struggles of the heart and the soul and the mind.

We need to rely absolutely upon the Word of God because of our external struggles, as well, our struggles with the world. "The wicked wait for me to destroy me," the psalmist says. Literally, this would read, "The wicked forces of this world are eagerly out to get me so that they can ruin me."

So we have in this section of Psalm 119, God's all-sufficiency – an all-sufficiency that rests upon His nature, His Word, His promises, His faithfulness. And on the other hand, we have our insufficiency – an insufficiency that is rooted in our sinfulness, our variability, our tendency to unfaithfulness. An insufficiency that is only overcome, that is only overwhelmed and overpowered, by salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and by the Word of God. That is the picture here. God's total sufficiency rescuing us from our total

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insufficiency. It is a picture of the Christian life, the Christian walk, the Christian position.

Satan's Use of the Implied Lie

And into this picture steps the one who wants to afflict us, the one who wants to ruin us. Into this picture steps our adversary, the Devil, "going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Into this picture steps the one who wants us to doubt God's all-sufficiency. Into this picture steps the one who wants us to think that we are somehow sufficient.

And how does the Devil do this? As we search the pages of Scripture we find that the Devil has one basic method that he always uses. That method is to cause us to forget that God and His Word are all-sufficient. Satan's method is to cause us to doubt God.

Satan's method is to cause us to question God. If we look at what the Word of God tells us about our adversary, we find that he is, in fact, very predictable. Whatever he does, however he comes at us, whether he does it from the inside, whether he does it from the outside, his entire purpose is to cause us to doubt God and believe a lie. That is how he seeks to bring us to spiritual ruin.

Now, if we understand what the Word of God says about our adversary, this should never surprise us. In John chapter eight, verse forty-four, Jesus told us exactly who the Devil is. Literally, the verse reads like this: "He was a murderer

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from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of the lie.”

That is Christ's own description of Satan. “A liar and the father of the lie.” And that is Satan's position as he steps into the picture. That is Satan's position as he seeks to place himself between the Christian and his God.

But not all of Satan's lies are outright lies. Satan is much more subtle than that. Often the most insidious lie, the most sinister lie, the most devastating lie, is the implied lie. Our adversary is the master of the implied lie. This is one of Satan's most clever devices. And as Paul tells us in Second Corinthians chapter two, verse eleven, we cannot afford to be ignorant of Satan's devices, because if we are, he will surely take advantage of us.

And so I want to focus our attention, first of all, on some of the ways in which we see this most clever of Satan's devices, the implied lie, in the pages of Scripture. And secondly, it is important for us to recognize that the same pattern of deception, the same tendency to fall prey to the implied lie of the Devil, exists in the church. And thirdly, finally, we need to understand that we ourselves, in our personal and individual walk with the Lord, we face the constant threat of this same clever device of Satan in our own lives.

But in contrast, I want to remind us of the polar opposite that we find in our unchanging and unchangeable God and in His forever settled Word. On the one

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hand, we find Satan constantly using the little unsettling word “if”. What if God’s Word isn’t really true? What if God doesn’t really mean what He says? That little, unsettling “if” that plants the seed of doubt. But on the other hand we find our God and His Word proclaiming not an unsettled “if” but a firmly settled “Amen”. A firmly settled, “It is so.” No if’s. No uncertainty. And that is our certainty. That is your certainty, as a child of God.

Satan’s “If’s” in the Pages of Scripture

So first of all, let us briefly consider some of the places in which we see this most clever of Satan’s devices, the implied lie, in the pages of Scripture.

Let me direct your attention first of all to Matthew chapter four, beginning at verse one. This, of course, is the familiar account of Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 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.’”

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Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' " Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

Notice Satan's implied lie – "*If* you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." – "*If* you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus, You are not who John the Baptist says you are. Jesus, You are not who You say you are.

And this is Satan's pattern in all of church history. Undermining the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ. Getting people to buy into the idea that Jesus is only a great moral example. Getting people to buy into the idea that Jesus was merely a martyr for a lost cause. Getting theologians to go out on a "quest for the historical Jesus" – not in recorded history as we have it in the Word of God, but in the philosophies of fallen men who do not bow the knee to Jesus.

And secondly let me direct your attention to Matthew chapter 27, beginning at verse 39. Jesus has been crucified. And the Jews take up the implied lie that Satan had put forth as he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew 27, beginning at verse 39:

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And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

The implied lie once again: "If you are the Son of God, if you are the King of Israel, come down from the cross." – "Let God deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' " Jesus, you are not really who You say You are.

And so the Apostle John, who was an eyewitness of these events, writes this in First John chapter two, verse twenty-two: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son [literally, "he who agrees with God the Father that Jesus is the Son] has the Father also."

And thirdly, we have the implied lie of the Devil in Genesis chapter three. The implied "If" of Satan's question, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And here is the implied lie: Eve, what if God is not telling you

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the whole truth? What if God is withholding something good from you? What if you really do know better than God? What if you can become like God?

Here we see, once again, what Paul in Ephesians six calls “the wiles of the Devil” – literally, the methods of the Devil. The pages of Scripture tell us exactly how Satan operates. The leading characteristic of the Devil’s method is that he seeks to sow the seeds of doubt, and the seeds of doubt spring up into confusion, and confusion leads you away from steadfastness in Christ.

And so we see this most clever of Satan’s devices, the implied lie, in the pages of Scripture. And let’s put this back into the context of the passage where we began, in Psalm 119. Satan wants us to doubt that we have an all-sufficient God. Satan wants us to doubt that God has given a forever settled Word. Satan wants us to doubt that Jesus is the all-sufficient Savior.

Satan’s If’s in the Church

Much of the Evangelical church is buying into that deception today. And that is why it is important, secondly, for us to recognize that Satan’s same pattern of deception, and man’s same tendency to fall prey to the implied lie of the Devil, exists in the church. Let me briefly mention two examples of this.

The first one goes right along with the matter that we considered a moment ago. According to reliable surveys, nearly half of the adults in Evangelical churches today believe that Jesus Christ probably or definitely committed sin while He was

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on earth. And here is the Devil's "if" – the implied lie – that you find in many so-called Evangelical churches today. It goes like this. Well, if Jesus committed sin, then at least he was just a regular kind of person like I am. And that's the kind of person that I want for a friend. Not some holier-than-thou person. Just a regular guy.

I have heard people who claim to be Evangelical Christians, more than once, say that their idea of Jesus is someone they could go to the bar and have a drink with on Saturday night. That is the kind of thinking we find in much of the Evangelical church today. That is the kind of teaching you will actually find in many so-called Evangelical pulpits today.

Well dear friends, let me turn that lie of the Devil around. If you do not believe in a sinless Christ you have not believed the one true Gospel. 2 Corinthians 5:21 – "He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The Gospel begins with the deity of Christ. The Gospel begins with the sinless perfection of Christ. That is why Satan wants to undermine and destroy those beliefs. If you do not believe in a sinless Christ, you have not believed the one true Gospel. You are not saved. And if you believe in a Christ who could have sinned, let me frankly say that I likewise fear for you, because the Word of God clearly teaches the impeccability of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His temptation in all points like as we are, yet without sin, was the proof of His perfection.

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Now, there is a second “if” of the Devil, and second implied lie of the Devil, that we find in the Evangelical church today, and it also has to do with the heart of the Gospel. Joel Osteen, the pastor of the largest Evangelical church in the United States, is often asked the question, “What about the people who don’t believe on Jesus Christ? Will they go to Heaven?”

Now I’m mentioning Joel Osteen by name because he is such a well-known figure. But you will find the same kind of answer to this question coming out of the mouths of many other men who call themselves Evangelicals. Joel Osteen’s answer goes like this. He says, “Well, I’ve spent a lot of time in India, and those millions of Hindus are very sincere people, and they love God, and I don’t see how God can reject them.” Here once again is the Devil’s “if”, and it goes like this:

If these people are so sincere, how can God reject them? – The answer, according to Scripture, is that you can be very sincere, but sincerely wrong.

And the lie also goes like this: If these people love God, how can He reject them? – The answer is that they cannot love a God who they do not even know.

And finally, the lie also goes like this (and this is what we might call the “Oprah version” of the lie, since she is one of today’s leading promoters of it): If you have your truth and I have my truth, won’t we all just get there somehow? – The answer is that there is only one Truth. Jesus is the truth. God’s Word, forever settled in Heaven, is the truth.

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And so we have seen Satan's implied lie, Satan's "if", in the pages of Scripture, and we have seen it in the life of the church today.

On Our Next Broadcast

Friends, there is a third major area in which Satan uses the implied lie, and that is in the life of the individual Christian. We find Satan's implied lie, Satan's "if", often creeping into our own hearts, into our own thinking. This takes a great many different forms. I know of one preacher who spent almost a whole year, in a series of Sunday morning sermons, just dealing with various aspects of this one issue.

But let me mention just one thing, one implied lie of the Devil that creeps into our hearts as Christians, and it goes like this: If I'm truly saved, if I'm really a Christian, if God the Holy Spirit really lives within me, why do I still have such struggles with sin? And of course, Satan's implied lie is that if you still have such struggles with sin, it means you're not really a Christian. Have you ever been troubled by that lie of the Devil? No doubt many of you listening to the sound of my voice today have been troubled in that way.

Well, in our next message we're going to take up that implied lie of the Devil, and I want to show you God's answer from Scripture. And then we're going to conclude by looking at one final point. If you are a Christian, people are going to ask you questions. People are going to ask you, "Why do you believe the Bible?"

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“How do you know the Bible is true?” The answer is this: Because God always keeps His promises. And we’re going to see how that settled fact gives us our rock-solid answer, every time the Devil approaches us with his implied lies. We hope you’ll join us for that program.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God’s Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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