

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

Title: "If I'm a Christian, Why Do I Still Struggle With Sin?" (Psalm 119:89-96)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/1/2011

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**Today's broadcast is the second portion of this two-part message.**

**This transcript contains the entire message.**

## **Introduction**

Today I would like to begin in a particular passage of Scripture, and then move on to some others that are related to it. The theme of my message is 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.

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. And 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".

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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.
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.

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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.

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

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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 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.

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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 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.

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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 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:

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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.' "

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

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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:

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

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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 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.

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## **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 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 –

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"He who knew no sin became sin 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.

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:

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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.

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.

### **Satan's "If's" in the Life of the Christian**

Thirdly, 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

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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 us have. Let me take a moment to give you God's answer to that implied lie of Satan.

When you were converted, you were, once and forever, fully and completely justified in Christ before God. Isaiah 61:10 tells us that you were at that moment clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. The Holy Spirit took up residence within you. But you are still a sinner. You are still "in the flesh."

Martin Luther was a man who used earthy illustrations. And to bring out this particular point he used the illustration of the farmers' manure piles in the fields of Germany. In the wintertime, the snow completely covered the manure piles – but underneath the beautiful white snow, they were still manure piles!

And so it is with each of us – we wear the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, so that we are really, perfectly, positionally righteous in the sight of God. Our sin problem has been dealt with, once for all. But underneath that garment, until we go to be with the Lord, we are still sinners in bodies of flesh, and we're still living in a world that is under the curse.

But because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within us, there is an inevitable and irreconcilable warfare between our flesh and God's Spirit. We might compare it to the body trying to reject a heart transplant. The transplanted organ is beneficial and life-saving to the body, but the body's natural defenses go

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to work to try to reject it as a foreign body. In the same way, the Spirit is a "foreign body" to the flesh, and the flesh constantly tries to "reject" this "foreign body." As the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians chapter five, "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

And this association of sin with the flesh is so complete that Paul in Colossians calls the sins of "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness" – he calls those things our "*members* which are upon the earth" (3:5). And in Romans chapter seven, Paul tells us out of his own experience, I do the very things that I now hate, Paul says, because of the presence of the Spirit within me.

And yet the Word of God makes it clear that you can take great comfort in this irreconcilable warfare, within you because it is a sign of two things: First, it is a sign of the fact the Holy Spirit in fact does live within you as the guarantee or down payment against the day of your ultimate redemption from this body of sin (Ephesians chapter 2). Second, the presence of this warfare in our lives demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work conforming us more and more to the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

And through this grace of sanctification, the Holy Spirit will have the ultimate victory over the flesh. Those whom God justifies, He inexorably sanctifies, and ultimately glorifies. The "golden chain" that Paul sets forth for us in Romans 8:30 cannot and will not be broken. Our sanctification is not complete in this life, but

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we have the assurance that God will, as Paul tells us in Romans 7, "deliver us from the body of this death...through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24-25).

So the next time Satan tries to get you to doubt your salvation because of your struggles with sin, there is your answer, from God's forever settled Word.

### **God's Forever Settled "Amen"**

If you are a Christian, people are going to ask you questions. People are going to ask you, "Why do you believe the Bible?" "How do you know the Bible is true?" The answer is this: Because God always keeps His promises.

People are going to ask you, "How do you know that Jesus Christ is the one and only Way, the one and only Truth, the one and only Life? How can you be so sure?" The answer is the same: Because God always keeps His promises.

People are going to ask you: "Why are you living the way you live? Why is it different?" (I trust that they notice that your life is different.) The answer is the same once again: I am endeavoring, by the grace of God, to live a life that pleases God, because God always keeps His promises.

In Second Peter chapter one, verse nineteen, Peter says this: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." In the original language it actually reads like this: "We also have the prophetic word made more sure." "

What exactly does Peter mean by this? Peter's point is that the word of prophecy that was given to Israel in ancient times has become "more sure" in the

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light of what has subsequently taken place. We have the word of prophecy itself made more sure. How has it been made more sure? By its fulfillment. It has been established. It has been substantiated, proven, demonstrated, confirmed, verified. God always keeps His promises – and He keeps His promises in, and through, and because of, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is “the prophetic word made more sure.” Jesus Christ Himself is the prophetic word substantiated and proven.

In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul puts it this way: “All the promises of God in Christ are ‘Yes,’ and in Him, ‘Amen’.” There in the Old Testament are the promises concerning Christ; there is the “Yes.” God’s affirmative: This is what I am going to do. And in the actual person and work of Jesus Christ we have the answer, the “Amen” – the substantiation and the fulfillment of everything God promised through His Old Testament prophets.

God keeps His promises. Every one. In every detail. Without exception. Nothing left out. No loose ends. God has proved that His promises are true. Everything that God has ever promised is being fulfilled. The first coming of Jesus Christ is a great declaration of the immutability of the counsel of God. God's Word is fixed and absolute and eternal.

And there is more to come. God is not slack concerning His promise, Peter says. The day of the Lord is coming. Just as surely as God kept every promise about the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, He will keep every promise about the Second Coming of Christ. And so, Peter says, “We according to His promise,



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look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." The "Golden Chain" of Romans 8:30 brought to its completion in our ultimate glorification. So dear friends, keep looking up. Jesus is coming again.

The fulfilled promises of God in Jesus Christ are the proof that God's Word is the one thing you can always trust. There are great and precious promises, 'exceeding great and precious promises' in the Word. There are promises to you when you are sick. There are promises to you when you suffer the loss of a loved one. There are promises to the widow. There are promises to the fatherless and the orphan.

There are promises to you when you are in every kind of physical and material and spiritual need. There are promises to you when you go through the deep waters and the fiery trials of temptations and testings. There are promises to you when you are in such anguish of soul that you don't know what to do or which way to turn. Every conceivable condition, every conceivable situation in which you can ever be, is covered by the sure promises of God.

And so I urge you, whenever Satan comes at you with his doubts, with his implied lies, lean on God's promises. Take them to heart. Make them yours. Prove, in your own life, by walking with Christ in the Spirit, that God always keeps His promises. And I know that many of you can testify to that fact, in marvelous ways. God has given His word, and you can take Him at His word.

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God is all-sufficient, God's total sufficiency rescues us from our total insufficiency. That is the picture of life in Christ.

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." Thanks be unto God for the One in whom all the promises of God are "Yes" and "Amen" without any shadow of a doubt.

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