

“Mind Games”
Pastor John Bronson

(Ephesians 6:10-20)

January 23, 2011

Order of Worship for January 23, 2011
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (?)

Call to Worship: Psalm 142 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Christians, Join to Sing”

Song # 225

“We Bow Down”

Overhead

“I Will Celebrate”

Song # 66

“The Deep Love of Jesus”

Overhead

“All Creatures of Our God and King”

Song # 63

Offering and Offertory

Message: “Mind Games” (Ephesians 6:10-20)
by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Faith is the Victory”

Song # 727

Parting Word of Grace

Evening Studies in the Word
Hebrews 4
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

January 23, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **The Nakamuras:** that the Spirit will soften the hearts and open the minds of the Japanese to the gospel; that Alisha and Nathan will make good and close friends at school; that Kerry and Richard will have a deepening love for the Lord, one another and the Japanese
2. President Obama: that the Spirit will give him courage and wisdom to rise above partisan politics; that the Spirit will work in his heart to love God’s truth and God’s people; that he will be protected from all evil
3. The Trustees: that they will enjoy unity of thought in planning and executing projects; that the Spirit will ensure adequate funds and personnel for their tasks; that they will sense the Lord’s pleasure and seek His glory in all they do
4. **Military Personnel of the week: SSgt Matthew Basner** (son of Randy and Lour Basner):
5. **College Student of the Week: Bethany Sweetman at Butte College** (daughter of Catherine Sweetman):

All should open their scriptures to Ephesians 6:10-20. We are working on a consideration of spiritual warfare. This passage with which Paul is concluding his letter to the Ephesians focuses our attention on the fact of spiritual warfare. I encourage you to be aware of the insert that has questions that relate to the unfolding of the topic. [Questions are attached at the end of the text.]

To live the Christian life in the real world, Paul says we need to be strong. You will note that the beginning of the passage says, “*Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*” We need to be strong. He explains to us why we need to be strong. We need to be strong because we are engaged in warfare. We have a fierce enemy, an enemy who only hates one thing more than he hates us, and that is God. You have to keep that in mind at all times.

Our enemy has a particular way of conducting his warfare. If you have an enemy, you need to understand the way your enemy fights. Our enemy fights with lies. He is a deceiver. So in every consideration that you and I take up in terms of how we are going to conduct ourselves in any space of time, entering into any ministry, engaged in any relationship, we should always say to ourselves, “I want to be aware that someone wants this relationship to go wrong, and the way in which that someone is going to make it go wrong is by deceiving my mind or the mind of the person with whom I am dealing.” He is the deceiver. Satan weaves a spell of lies so that we no longer know the truth or see things clearly. That is his intention. That is why I entitled the message today “Mind Games”. Satan constantly plays mind games with us. We need to be always on guard. It is a warfare for the mind.

If we want to come to understand some of the basic realities and truths that scripture wants to give to us and [regarding] the spiritual life we lead, it is usually wise if possible to drop back to the beginning. Please open your scriptures to Genesis 3:1-7. The reason we are going there is because at this point we have our first exposure, as it were, the first introduction to how Satan carries out his work, how he works on us. This passage is well known to most who are familiar with the scriptures, most who are familiar with the Christian life, the walk of faith. It is the account of the temptation of Eve in the Garden. It is the story of the Fall. This is what we are told.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw... So [the woman’s eyes suddenly pop open. She looks]: “This tree is good to eat! It is nice to look at; and it will make me wise!”

What was Satan doing? Satan seduced her with an apparent good. That is not all that he did. He did something more fundamental. He seduced her to wanting an apparent good at the price of rejecting the authority of the Word of God. Now he did something more fundamental than that. He recasts God, and instead of God being the Holy One and the Creator and giver of all things, he has slipped in an insinuation: “God is not to be trusted! You cannot take what he said at face value. He did not tell you the whole truth about the situation. God has a hidden agenda. Doubt! God knows that there is a great good thing you can have if you are just willing to reach out and get it!” And she did. Satan, of course, lied.

It is worth pausing at this point and asking the Holy Spirit to talk to us: “Does Satan talk to me that way? Have I been drawn into that conversation?” Do we find ourselves at times thinking of God in these terms? Or, more likely, do we find ourselves separating “God” from the Word, because the Word is so difficult? The Word says “No” when I want “Yes”. The Word says “Do not touch,” but I say, “It looks like it would feel so good.” Do we say to ourselves, “I’m sure God doesn’t really mean what it says there. I’m sure God really has a better plan for me; it is just those Christians, it is just that Bible, it is just those preachers: they are the ones who have all that negativity. I’ll bet you God is really very positive fellow, and He would be very delighted if I could enjoy good things to eat that

are pretty to look at and taste wonderful and I am sure will make me wise!” Did you ever get into that kind of situation? There is something we should be very aware of in our spiritually alive and spiritually dead age: you should know that Satan is not at all opposed to you having lots of good thoughts about “God”...as long as it is not the true God. As long as you are willing to reshape God according to your imagination, he is delighted to have you just spend all kinds of time meditating upon, thinking about, praying to, hoping for, looking after “God”, just as long as He is made in your image, not in the image given to us in the Word after Jesus Christ. Remember, Satan is a deceiver. That is why you must know what the truth is or you won’t know when you are being deceived.

When writing to the Corinthians Paul made this categorical statement, 2Corinthians 10:3-6: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.”* Every thought captive to Christ - Ephesians chapter 6:10-20 speaks of spiritual warfare in its broad outline. We will continue to move through this passage and gain a sense of the variety of ways in which we need to defend ourselves. But in 2Corinthians the issue is narrowed down to its essence, and its essence is the competition for the mind. It is the mind, what we think about, what we dream about, what we calculate for, what we want to organize our lives to accomplish, that is where the battle ordinarily occurs. Satan is the enemy, the adversary of our souls of whom Paul said he can at times appear as an angel of light. He is exceedingly clever and deadly of purpose. His purpose is always to do all that he can to cancel God’s work of grace in our lives, to destroy our testimony by drawing us away from our fellowship with God, and above all, drawing us away from a knowledge of His Word, because if we do not know the Word, we do not know when we are being deceived. That is most desirable from Satan’s point of view. If we are ignorant, we are easily led. If we are ignorant, we are easily deceived and easily led in other directions.

We should by no means think that the devil’s strategy is always the same, even less that he is inclined to directly confront and challenge our faith. Far better, from his point of view, is to seduce us into thinking that faith is irrelevant for most of the issues of our lives. All you have to do is ask this question: how many times during this past week did any of the issues you face appear to you as an issue of faith wherein you needed to reference what you knew to be true about God and His ways? Or have many of us managed to go through the entire week never thinking about God at all, and actually puzzled in our minds, “How does scripture even apply to most of this stuff?” as if it didn’t. One of the essentials in any debate [is that] the person who asks the question and frames the debate usually wins it. The way you ask the question regarding the issue tends to limit and define what obtains or pertains to that issue. So if Satan can raise the issues of life to us in such a way that faith has no relevance, he can make us dance to his tune at the very moment we think we are being righteous and virtuous.

In 2Thessalonians 2:9-10 Paul gives this description of Satan: *“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, [now listen to the end] because they refused to love the truth...”* It is not the case that the truth was not presented to them, it was not the case that the truth was not available to them, it was not the case that truth was not opened to them: they simply chose to turn away because they loved something else more. It was not the case that Eve did not know she was not supposed to eat that fruit. She knew full well she was not supposed to eat that fruit. But she allowed herself to be persuaded otherwise.

We laugh about – understandably so – our oft repeated failures to follow through on commitments we have made, particularly diets. But let me simply place this consideration in all of our minds. It is perhaps a more dangerous thing than we think that we give ourselves permission to break our promises and abandon our commitments. One of the interesting things that some of us that have opportunity to be studying in the small groups on marriage [is that] one of the authors made this observation objecting to the modern practice of dating in anticipation of marriage. You date this girl, then you date that girl (I’m a guy so I date girls! If you’re a girl I hope you date guys!)

Anyway you date this one, and then try out that one, and then you try out this one, and this is what the writer said: that is called developing serial relationships, and if you do serial relationships when you are dating you are likely to follow the same pattern when you are married. Ah, that is different.

Satan deceives those who do not love the truth. I read on the internet an interesting little article which I thought so beautifully illustrated what real love entails. It is not a Christian article. It is about a little boy who has a rare disease. In his rare disease he became closely attached to a hockey team. Love and hockey teams are a kind of a long distance apart from each other, nevertheless this hockey team took a great interest in the little boy. The Hockey team, however, was sold by the city that the little boy lived in and was purchased by another city about three or four states away. So the little boy's family sold their home and followed the team. Pretty nice; pretty high commitment; pretty great sacrifice: are we willing to do the same? Are we willing to sell out in order to follow what we love? Are we willing to sell out and follow where God calls us to go? That is love. That is what my wife did. You know I married a California girl. How many like to live in the Bay Area: forget the moral issues and think about the weather. Do you know where I took this sweet young lady? I took her to Illinois! It is awful living in Illinois! We arrived in Illinois when it was over ninety degrees and the humidity was the same. We instantly knew that no humans lived there, unless they were being punished by God. And then we knew it was really true when the weather dropped right down into the sub-freezing – I grew up in San Diego! – sub-freezing temperatures with snow and wind and ice: clearly this was hell! But she followed me. Whom do we follow? It is not a good thing to get into the habit of breaking our commitments. It is not a good thing. The enemy delights in people who do not have sufficient character to stand fast upon the ground which they have claimed out of obedience to Jesus Christ.

Returning to Ephesians 6 Paul says, “...we are to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” Whatever else that means, and we will look at it some more, it means that we need to have our focus fixed on the Lord. We need to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Altogether that sentence is saying, pay attention to Jesus. That is what it says. We receive a little guidance if we follow to the next verse. Verse 10 says put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Paul's counsel is not that we should aspire to just any kind of strength or power. Our need is to have the strength to resist or stand against the schemes of the devil. That is what we need to concentrate on and think about.

Schemes are rarely direct assaults. Direct assaults certainly may come, but if they do they are secondary, not primary. We should understand something in dealing with our enemy. Those who oppose our faith and even assault us, themselves are victims. In 2Tim.3:13 Paul talks about the fact that the deceivers are themselves deceived. Our real enemy is not, therefore, the person in front of us; the real enemy is the power behind that person and using that person. We will certainly need to be on guard against the dangers that these people pose, but we also need to view them with compassion. We need to seek their good. We need to free them from their bondage.

Let me ask you a question: who is more heart-renderingly sad than someone like Madelyn Murray O'Hare? She is absolutely hopeless. What about the drug lords in Mexico? These dealers in corruption and violence: what do we think the states of their hearts are? What do we think occupies their minds? For them, if they look forward and they see death, they can not be anything less than horrified. You and I by the grace of God anticipate glory, the welcoming arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You and I welcome the day when all of the burdens and troubles and sorrows of our lives are finally removed; all of the deep woundings and marks of sin that have been left upon us are finally eased away. For us the prospect of eternity is one of incredible and indescribable goodness: but not for them. Therefore should we not contemplate those who assault us with compassion? For that is indeed how our Lord looks upon us. We should not be deceived. We should never forget who the enemy is. It is not the man speaking to us; it is the evil one behind the man. Our hearts should long to see the man set free.

I have a book – I always have books! The only person I know in this room who has a greater love of books, and is probably equally mentally unbalanced as I am, is Harlan. If any of you know Harlan Lundberg you know that he is

just nuts about reading books. So we are going to give you this book, Harlan, a good book. Do you know what? There is a church of over 1800 people in the city of Bagdad! You never hear about that, of course. This is a man who went from England. He was called to be a peace maker. He has to work constantly with Jews and Muslims, and he loves them. That is why he has a church of some 1800 people, because he loves them. He speaks the Word of God's grace to them, and he tells them that they are welcome in the presence of the Savior. He doesn't judge them, he doesn't condemn them. He simply says, love is available. Love is available! Because why on earth should I hate the terrorist who is so gripped by the reality of sin that his life is twisted into a passion of hate? What sadness! And all that he has to hope for is a lie. What tragedy! How nice it is to know that in the middle of so much deception and hatred and violence there is a church full of the love of Jesus Christ. Amen

You and I need to ask ourselves that question. It is a very interesting thing. Paul had some encounters with people who didn't like what he had to say. Read the book of Acts. It is most interesting if you go back and read Acts 26:29, Paul is there standing in front of King Agrippa and the governor from Rome in the city of Caesarea. Paul has already been in prison for over a year. He is in prison for preaching and teaching the gospel. He is in prison because he has lifted up the name of Jesus and the Jewish authorities hate him for having done so. He is looking at the men of power whose decisions will determine his future under the grace of God. One of them is living with his brother's wife. What does he say? He says this: *“I would to God that not only you but all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”* Paul prays for his enemies, that his captors would be saved. He does not pray that they would go to hell.

We are engaged in a war. We must never be deceived by our enemy into taking his view of things. His view of things is, “I can't wait to bring as much pain and trouble into your life as I possibly can.” But Christ's view of things is, “I am willing to die that you would be blessed.” That is our choice.

Let us pray: Our gracious heavenly Father, we want to be like Jesus. We do not want to sacrifice our souls for the souls of those around us for any of the apparent goods of the world. We do not, Father, want to be deceived into thinking that you, our Father, would desire anything other or less than the best for us. Teach us, therefore, to look with humility and expectancy and with fullness of joy upon every day and every opportunity to know that it is the love of God, it is the love of God that is ours and ours to give: in Jesus' name. Amen.

“We ought not to be alarmist, but this seems to have become the default position of most Christians when addressing cultural and political issues. The alarmist operates from fear; the Christian is to act from hope. The alarmist acts in weakness; the Christian operates from strength. The alarmist apprehends imminent defeat; the Christian knows final victory. The alarmist is gripped by inner doubt; the Christian draws strength from inner peace.”

Questions for further understanding:

1. If you were under spiritual attack, how would you know, what would be the signs or evidence?
2. What are some “apparent goods” that lead people away from faith and obedience to God?
3. Do you ever feel like God is your enemy, or at least that He is unsympathetic or even unreasonable?
4. What would be some indicators that a person loves the truth?
5. Do you know your f greatest weaknesses or susceptibilities to being deceived? What are some ways we can protect ourselves from such areas: “...disciplined so as not to be enticed...”
6. Why do Christians “rejoice in the Lord”?
7. What is the difference between “rejoicing in the Lord” and “...*the joy of the Lord is your strength*”?
8. About what things do Christians seem most often to most alarmed? Why should Christians not be “alarmists”?