**What On Earth Is God Doing? Satan’s Conflict With God**

***Lesson Six***

***THE CONFLICT***

***FROM THE COUNTER REFORMATION***

***THROUGH THE PHILSOPHY OF***

***RITSCHL***

With the rise and widespread growth of Protestantism, Satan was confronted with a twofold task. First, it was imperative that he prevent the entire organized church from going Protestant. Second, it was essential that he get rid of Protestantism, since it had rejected must of the apostasy and was preaching the true gospel. In order to accomplish his task, Satan used a new wave of religious fervor that began to energize the Roman Church in response to the Reformation. This revitalization of the Roman Church became known as the Counter Reformation.

One important phase of the Counter Reformation was the Council of Trent which met from 1545 to 1563. Although this council did adopt some healthy reforms, it reasserted the Roman Church’s continued belief in many of its traditional doctrines, such as the following: justification is by faith plus subsequent works, the seven sacraments are channels of grace, the Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice, and the tradition of the church is of equal authority with the Scriptures. For the first time the church declared the apocryphal books to be canonical and of equal authority with the Bible. The council turned the Roman Church’s beliefs into a dogma that was binding upon all its people. Thus Satan succeeded in preventing the entire Roman Church from returning to New Testament principles.

The Counter Reformation gave birth to the Jesuits, a monastic order devoted to fighting Protestantism and spreading the Roman faith. Although they frequently used unethical means, the Jesuits were able to regain Poland, southern Netherlands, and large parts of Germany for the Roman Church. Their missionaries spread their faith to several new lands.

The Roman church instituted the Index, a list of books its people were forbidden to read. The Index kept many of the church’s members from reading Protestant literature. Thus Satan was able to prevent these people from becoming exposed to New Testament teaching.

Finally, the Counter Reformation employed persecution in its fight against Protestantism. Governments controlled by the Roman Church were prompted to annihilate the Reformation faith. The Spanish government led in this activity in behalf of the Netherlands. Multitudes of people were tortured and burned. Many were forced to recant their Protestant views. In the Netherlands the Spanish troops instituted a reign of terror that executed at least seventeen thousand.

In France the government persecuted the Huguenots fiercely from 1538 to 1559, then conducted eight bloody wars against them from 1559 to 1598. In the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572 some ten to twenty thousand Protestants were butchered for their faith.

In England Queen Mary Tudor (1553-1558) executed some three hundred Protestant pastors and forced the rest to flee the country. When Queen Elizabeth I restored a moderate form of Protestantism to the land, the pope began training Jesuits to conduct guerrilla warfare in England. He also persuaded the king of Spain to conquer England for the Roman Church by sailing the great “invincible” Spanish Armada against her. The Armada sailed in 1588, but she suffered a very embarrassing defeat as a result of good English seamanship, contrary weather, and other circumstances beyond human control. Thus God destroyed the naval power of the Roman Church’s most powerful ally and established England as the champion of Protestantism in Europe. This defeat aided the cause of Protestantism not only in England, but also the Netherlands, where it limited Spanish power.

By 1609 much of Europe was divided into two armed camps of Protestantism and Romanism. For political as well as religious reasons these two camps waged the Thirty Years’ War against each other (1618-1648). Finally, when the war was settled by the Peace of Westphalia, Lutheranism and Calvinism became recognized religions, and the boundaries of Protestant and Roman Church states were fixed. This ended the Reformation Era and the systematic persecution of the Protestant movement by the Roman Church. God had preserved Protestantism from external destruction.

**Internal Attacks Against Protestantism**

While Satan was attempting to destroy the Protestant witness of the gospel, through outside forces, he also was working to disgrace and destroy the movement from within. Although all the Protestant groups had rejected much of the apostasy of the Roman Church, many still carried with them some of the Roman beliefs and practices. Most groups continued to reject the concept of a future, theocratic kingdom. They believed that their church was the kingdom of God on earth and that it was to operate basically as Israel had in Old Testament times. This meant that the Protestant Church and the state were to be united, with the state enforcing the church’s policies. No one was to be permitted to hold beliefs contrary to the official teaching of the church. These concepts were contrary to Scripture. Because of these wrong beliefs, some Protestant groups resorted to the same tactic as the Roman Church – the bloody persecution of those who held other beliefs. Through this means Satan brought disgrace to the Protestant movement.

The Anabaptists disagreed strongly with the policy of persecuting those of contrary belief. They were convinced that church and state should be kept separate and that no one church should enforce its beliefs upon others. One reason for this conviction was the fact that many Anabaptists rejected the idea that the church is the kingdom promised in the Old Testament. They believed in a future, theocratic kingdom on earth.

Satan attempted to stamp out this belief in the future kingdom by trying to destroy the Anabaptist movement. Because the Anabaptists disagreed with certain views of the other Protestants, they were persecuted severely. Thus Satan used Protestants to attack other parts of the Reformation faith. Although many Anabaptists were put to death, God continued to preserve the movement.

Since he could not destroy those who taught the doctrine of a future kingdom, Satan tried to disgrace the doctrine. He used a group of fanatical Anabaptists at Munster, Germany, who introduced to the concept of the kingdom extreme ideas and practices contrary to Scripture. Their radical practices not only disgraced belief in a future kingdom, but also brought further persecution from Protestants and Roman Catholics.

**The Apostasy of the Modern Era**

*The Rise of Rationalism and Empiricism*

Satan had not been able to destroy Protestantism, but he still was determined to rid the world of the true gospel; the belief that the Bible was God’s inspired revelation to man; and the hope of God establishing His future, theocratic kingdom with all its blessings for man. With this goal in view he prompted the rise of some new movements that would trigger a chain reaction of apostasy. This apostasy would affect the whole world, including much of Protestantism.

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a new intellectual movement known as rationalism developed in Europe. These rationalists stressed the importance of human reasoning and the senses, as opposed to divine revelation, as the key to discovering truth. Men began to look at the universe as a machine that operates solely by natural law, not by divine providence or intervention. As the knowledge of non-Christian religions grew, some thinkers began searching for a natural religion that would be common to all men apart from the Bible and the Church.

The rise of rationalism was accompanied by the introduction of empiricism. Empiricists believed that no idea should be adopted unless its truth has been established through repeated tests than can be observed by the human senses. In other words, it is reasonable to believe only those things that can be demonstrated through the scientific method. When carried to its logical conclusion, empiricism ruled out belief in truths that came by divine revelation. Such truths deal with spiritual things, and spiritual things are not subject to scientific tests that can be observed by the senses.

*The Development of Deism*

Rationalism and empiricism gave birth to a new religion called deism. This new faith began in England during the seventeenth century, then spread to France, Germany, and America in the eighteenth. It could be called a natural religion or religion of reason. Deism accepted the rationalistic concept that the universe is governed solely by natural law apart from divine providence or intervention, but it could not explain the origin of the universe apart from God. Thus one of its major teachings was as follows: a Supreme Being created the universe; but after He created it, He totally withdrew Himself from it and had nothing more to do with it.

This major concept led deism to several conclusions. First, there has been no supernatural revelation of truth to man since the world began. Second, there is no such thing as miracles. Third, the Bible is not a supernaturally inspired book. Fourth, Jesus Christ was not God incarnate in human flesh. Deism had draw these conclusions in order to avoid the idea that God has been active in human history.

Another major teaching of deism was this: since there has been no supernatural revelation, man’s only means of discovering truth is through human reason by use of the scientific method. Deism practically ignored the problem of human sin. It believed that man was essentially good and perfectible; therefore, it expected continued progress to a more perfect order on earth. In other words, deism believed that man would establish an earthly utopia through his own efforts, without the supernatural intervention of God. This new faith proved to be an ancestor of liberal Protestantism.

*The Divine Counteraction of Rationalism, Empiricism, and Deism*

Through rationalism, empiricism, and deism, Satan was striking blows at the gospel, the Bible, and the concept of a future theocratic kingdom. God countered these movements in order to preserve a continuing witness for the kingdom of God. The counteraction in Germany was in the form of the pietist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. People of established churches began to gather together for Bible study and prayer and to emphasize a life of piety. Pietism gave birth to the Moravian Church, which, in its warm evangelical zeal, sent out missionaries to preach the gospel.

The counteraction in England was the eighteenth century Wesleyan revivals, which reached millions with the gospel, gave birth to the Methodist Church, and saved England from national disaster. In America God used the Great Awakening, which evangelized multitudes through such men as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.

*The Philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher*

During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Satan began to build a superstructure upon the foundation of modern apostasy laid through rationalism, empiricism, and deism. The original building materials used in this superstructure were the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, George Hegel, and Fredrich Schleiermacher.

Kant (1724-1804) declared that knowledge is limited to the world that the human senses can perceive. Since man can know only what his senses experience, there can be no knowledge that comes through special, divine revelation. In fact, there is no such thing as special revelation. Religious beliefs can be based only upon the universal concept of duty or law that all men possess. In other words, man’s concept of God and spiritual things must be derived from his daily, moral experience. Kant’s philosophy ruled out the belief that the Scriptures are God’s special revelation to man.

Hegel, who died in 1831, concluded that the true essence of Christianity resides in its great ideas, not in the historical events that gave birth to them. Indeed, whether or not the ideas are based upon true historical facts is unimportant. Thus, although the ideas of Christianity are derived from the Bible, their truth is not dependent upon the historical accuracy of that book. Thus, according to Hegel, an inerrant Bible is not essential to true Christianity.

Schleiermacher (1758-1834) proposed that, at its heart, true religion is neither belief in nor obedience to a system of theology or a code or moral absolutes. Instead, religion is “an immediately experienced relation to God.” Thus doctrine and standards of conduct are not important. What is important is experience. The Bible is not a divinely inspired book of instruction. Instead, it is a human interpretation of man’s religious experience. Thus, according to Schleiermacher, the Scriptures are not the final authority for faith and practice. Only living religious experience is the final authority.

*The Development of Destructive Criticism*

These new philosophies of religious authority and of the meaning of revelation made possible the development of destructive criticism of the Bible. This movement appeared at the time Schleiermacher was completing his work. Protestant scholars began to abandon the belief that the Bible is a divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant record of divine revelation to man. They substituted the idea that the Scriptures are a human record of the development of man’s consciousness. Thus, although they possess some records of historical value, the Scriptures contain widely differing concepts of God and His will for man. They also contain legends, fiction, errors, and contradictions.

Scholars began to evaluate the Bible like any other piece of literature. They questioned the reliability of the Old Testament, especially its record of creation, the flood, and the development of Israel. Some concluded that the Gospels did not always present an accurate record of the true Jesus of history; therefore, it was necessary “to distinguish the words and character of Jesus from the interpretations which the church had later placed upon Him and His work.” Predictive prophecy and miracles were rejected as unauthentic, and the teaching about the future theocratic kingdom was either rejected or interpreted in terms of nineteenth-century thought.

Thus Satan, knowing that the account of his rebellion and defeat is presented in the Bible, was trying desperately to discredit that book. He directed his attack especially against those portions of Scripture that record the origin of himself and man, the first promise of his fall and the Redeemer, the prophecies of his defeat and the establishment of the theocratic kingdom, and the miraculous powers that the Redeemer possesses to destroy his kingdom and establish God’s.

*The Rise of Commercialism*

With Science giving birth to many new discoveries and inventions, and with the Industrial Revolution providing the means for mass production of goods, man was faced with the glowing prospect of an unprecedented abundance of material things. Numerous people made mammon their god and materialism their philosophy of life. Satan used commercialism as a tool for getting man so absorbed with temporal things that he had no time to think about God or his own destiny after his life.

*The Birth of Communism*

Along with its promise of material benefits, commercialism brought some grave injustices. Working people often were exploited, as their employers made themselves wealthy at their expense. The situation became so severe that it was only a matter of time until someone would cry for a revolution to change the social order. That time came when Karl Marx published his Communist Manifesto (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867).

Marx believed that history is controlled by economic factors and is characterized by continual class conflict. Thus everything is either a direct or indirect result of the economic struggle between workers and capitalists. Even religion is a product of economic forces. Capitalists use its concept of punishment and reward in the hereafter as their means of persuading the workers to accept quietly their exploited status in the present life. Thus religion is the “opiate of the people.” In the class struggle, religion should be annihilated.

Because of these Marxist ideas, Communism waged war against the Bible, the organized church, belief in the existence of God and life hereafter, and the concepts of human sin and divinely revealed moral absolutes. In place of these it substituted materialistic atheism and hope of a future, man-made utopia on earth. This utopia would be a communistic society in which every man produces according to his ability and shares in the goods of society according to his needs. Thus, in communism Satan not only had an enemy of Christianity but also a counterfeit hope to substitute for belief in the future theocratic kingdom.

*The Impact of the Evolutionary Theory*

The publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859 shook the scientific and religious worlds. In his work Darwin offered evidence for the gradual evolution of living things from simpler to more complex forms, gave a reasonable explanation as to how evolution took place – through the process of natural selection or survival of the fittest – and used his theory “to account for the origin of the human race.”

Through time the theory of evolution was applied to religion as well as biology. The impact of this application upon Christianity was earthshaking. First, by asserting than man evolved from lower forms of life, it struck at the biblical view that man originated by a direct, special creative act of God. Second, by setting back the date of man’s origin by aeons of time, it raised doubt about the centrality of the Judeo-Christian influence in the history of mankind. Third, by questioning the biblical account of the fall of man, it caused a new definition of sin. To evolution sin is merely the remnant of animal instinct in man. Fourth, this new concept of sin led to new views concerning redemption. There was no need of a redeemer dying as a substitute to pay the penalty of man’s sin. Thus Jesus Christ was not the Redeemer making vicarious atonement. Redemption is the gradual process of educating man to overcome his animal instincts.

Fifth, evolution portrayed Christianity, the Bible, and the concept of one God as being products of the evolutionary development of man’s religious consciousness. Thus the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions is not that of absolute truth as opposed to error. Instead, the various religions represent different stages in the development of man’s religious insight, with Christianity being the most advanced stage thus far. Sixth, with religion being a continual state of development, there can be no such thing as moral absolutes that are binding upon all men at all times. “Good conduct is merely those actions deemed suitable by each generation for the conduct of society.”

Evolution caused two different mental attitudes among those who accepted it as being true. One attitude was that of despair. Some people found it impossible to reconcile the horrible “red in tooth and claw” struggle and waste of the evolutionary process with the existence of a good and sovereign Creator. This destroyed their belief in God. Everything appeared to exist and operate purely by chance. They concluded that there is not intelligent purpose for life and the existence of man. A modern-day evolutionist who came to this conclusion expressed it this way:

*Man is the result of a purposeless and materialistic process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned. He is a state of matter, a form of life, a sort of animal, and a species of the Order Primates, akin nearly or remotely to all of life and indeed to all that is material.*

For many nineteenth-century Protestants, evolution caused an attitude of optimism. They concluded that evolution is the process that God used to create and maintain life. Thus God works within natural processes instead of by miraculous intervention in the natural order. This view stressed the immanence of God – the idea that He is everywhere present in nature. It rejected the biblical concept of a perfect order coming through the direct intervention of God in the establishment of His future, theocratic kingdom. It substituted the idea that the world would become increasingly better through human effort. In evolution Satan had a powerful tool with which to attack Christianity in many different areas.

*The Divine Counteraction During the Nineteenth Century*

While Satan was assaulting the kingdom of God with faulty philosophies, destructive criticism, commercialism, communistic ideas, and evolution, God was countering his attacks with an active witness of His own. The nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented Protestant missionary activity. Mission boards were founded both in England and America. The gospel was carried to India, Africa, China, and other lands by such pioneers as William Carey, David Livingstone, and Adoniram Judson. America experienced the Second Awakening and numerous frontier revivals during the earlier part of the century. As some schools became apostate, God raised up new ones, such as Andover and Princeton Seminaries, to train men in the true faith. Over the course of the century great evangelistic efforts were put forth by such men as Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and R.A. Torrey. Through all of this many souls were added to the kingdom of God.

*The Philosophy of Ritschl*

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the philosophy of Albrecht Ritschl began to affect Protestant thinking. Ritschl (1822-1889) agreed with Schleiermacher that all religious belief is grounded in religious experience, but he also agreed with Kant that religious experience is essentially moral in nature. Thus Christianity is not doctrine; instead, it is totally the daily practice of life.

Ritschl emphasized the love of God so much that he suppressed the concepts of God’s holiness and justice and denied divine wrath. This caused him to reject the idea of original sin and the doctrine of the punishment of the lost. According to Ritschl, the kingdom of God is the “organization of humanity through action inspired by love.” He believed that the goal of religion is the victory of man over his bondage to nature. Ritschl’s philosophy helped to develop the social gospel.