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Presentation Transcript
Can the Devil Be Grateful?
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Our title today asks the question: *Can the Devil Be Grateful?* What do you think? Is it possible? What would be the benefit in asking the question? What can we learn from thinking about it?

We can start with God has let us understand about the devil. As we look into scripture, we see a clouded, yet telling, picture of the devil in scripture. It's a sad, sad story.

We learn of his original amazing beauty, given him by God, that was perverted by his own attitude. We can read that in Isaiah. We're told God created him with his own musical instrument even – a set of pipes. Whether that's his voice or not, we don't know. We see God revealing him as arrogant because of his beauty and power. And we see him going to the third heaven and attacking God. We see him falling from heaven in defeat through the eyes of Jesus, and then being confined to the earth. We see him cunningly subjugating Adam and Eve to his will by his lies. We see Jesus visiting him during the days of Noah in his arrest. We see him sarcastically telling God that he could turn Job – huge disrespect to the One who had created him beautiful and given him great status. Now he thinks he knows more than God does. We see him desperately trying to get Jesus, while He was on the earth, to obey him rather than the Father. We see him, through the ages, making war on God's people, and all people, for that matter – always trying to thwart God's master plan with his lies. We see him called the god of this world in the scriptures. And finally, we see him chained by a glorious angel, whom he was once like, and restrained in the pit of fire for a thousand years, utterly defeated. But we *never* see him grateful to anyone for anything.

One set of events I did not mention about the devil was that he garnered the support of one-third of the angels to his plot. And I think that also tells us something about him. Let's look at this scripture in Hebrews 12:15. Paul says:

Hebrews 12:15 – *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God* – I mean, that’s the most important thing for us, isn’t it? We can’t go anywhere with God until we’re sin free. And he said, following from that: *that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.*

What is bitterness? And why is it so, apparently, contagious among people? How do we define it? What exactly is Paul talking about? Well, if you look up the words that he used, Louw & Nida tells us that it means: bitterness – pertaining to be bitter. And then, bitter or pungent, a strong bitterness or a strong pungent smell. So bitterness is not an attitude. It’s a modifier of an attitude. Whatever the negative emotion is – anger, jealousy, selfishness – bitterness takes it to a deeper, more damaging level.

So, how does this cause so much trouble, as Paul said? Well, in their explanation about what the words mean, they quoted James 3:11:

James 3:11 – *No spring of water pours out sweet water and bitter water from the same opening.*

So, you can either be sweet, or you can be bitter. But you can’t be both at once. James is here saying that we can have all sorts of attitudinal issues that are negative, but when one of them grows strong enough, it turns bitter and no longer able to put forth anything positive. And that can be contagious. So, why? Well, it doesn’t explain why here, but I have an observation about that. I’m not saying it’s completely true in every case, but I have seen it, and you may have too.

Because of the devil’s influence in the world, many of us have a hard time getting excited about much of anything related to God. We *wish* we could be excited and zealous, and that’s a good desire, but others things, quite often, keep distracting us from the good things we intend to do.

Often, when someone becomes bitter, that person becomes energetically obsessed with the object of their obsession – plenty of energy and excitement. And, if we listen to people like Hitler, for example, he was obviously angry and resentful – so much so, that he became obsessed. Showing that he and his nation were superior, and were entitled to be in control of other nations, was part of his obsession. And he had incredible energy for that. The more he energetically screamed and pounded and gestured, the more the German people loved it.

Obsessed people are quite often seen to be on a mission. In our case, that would be a mission related to church, usually. And the energy can be the appeal to many who don’t understand what they’re looking at. Lacking energy, they’re drawn to energy. So, for this reason, bitterness is a dangerous state to be in or around. There may be other reasons as well.

The devil is desperately bitter. And he obviously campaigned among the angels, spreading his bitterness. It may be that rather than loud public pronouncements, as with Hitler’s approach, it

seems more likely that he was subtle about it. But either way, he gained control of one-third of his audience.

So, where does bitterness come from? Where does it start? Let's reverse engineer that a little bit. Can we go bitter without first being resentful? It's likely that more of us can identify feelings of resentment within ourselves than we can bitterness. Resentment is a common thing and bitterness comes along once in a while, it seems like. But if we can, then we can understand that resentment can turn into bitterness.

So, let's say we resent, for example, that someone else got the award, or the raise, or the promotion, or the attention, or the talent, and the more we think about, the stronger the resentment becomes. If we don't get a handle on it, we may end up feeling bitterly resentful. And that strong feeling in us eventually leads to strong, negative talk or action. God said to Cain, "Why do you look so upset? If you had done well, would you not have been accepted?" Now, we don't know the details, but God reveals to us that Cain was upset because God had not accepted his offering. His offering was not what God told everyone He wanted. That would mean that Cain knew this ahead of time – knew what God wanted him to do – and he just didn't do it. Abel knew what was acceptable and he produced the kind of offering God wanted. Cain did not. But Cain wanted to be accepted like his brother, but he didn't want to do what Abel did to be accepted. He felt entitled to God's acceptance. Entitled, right? He felt just because he was Cain, he should have whatever he wanted. So, God counseled Cain to recognize that he was close to catastrophe. He implied sin was not a natural part of his nature, but it was, instead, crouching at the door, seeking entrance into his mind. And all he had to do was believe God wasn't fair, like his parents did, and his goose would be cooked. And when he let it in, we see his resentment against God and his brother, and he became bitterly angry with both God and Abel. And we all know what happened, don't we?

So, what was it that caused Cain to become resentful, and then angry, and then bitterly angry? Well, he clearly thought he was entitled to acceptance, even though he had not done what he was told to do. So, what reason do you suppose caused him to believe he was entitled to God's approval without doing what God would approve of? Well, he probably could point to a number of things that he had done right – to justify his position – just like we might list all the things we've done at work to justify getting a raise or a promotion. Or, at school, various assignments we've done. That kind of thinking – when faced with something that we didn't get when we felt entitled to – is like gasoline on a fire.

So, let's ask this question in our reverse engineering process here. Can we feel entitled without first feeling ungrateful? It might take a bit of thinking to make this connection. When we don't get the raise – and now, here's the important part – all of our attention goes away from how happy we were, and how relieved, and how thankful we were when we first got our job. We forget that we like our job, how good the benefits are, how much the income means to our family, how relieved we were to have steady income. We forget that. All of our thinking goes

toward all that we have done, and how unappreciated we are, and how unfair our boss is to bolster our own case. We think about all the other times we've seen our boss act in an unfair manner, and without directly seeing some of them, we have learned of them around the water cooler, so to speak. So, we start building a case in our minds.

This is exactly what the devil did with Adam and Eve. He simply suggested that God was withholding from them. He didn't say God was unfair. He didn't have to. Once they believed God was withholding, they added the unfair piece themselves. He probably used the same strategy with the angels he won over. By the time he got to Adam and Eve, he was well practiced at it – a master at helping people become bitter. He learned that less is better, because it doesn't take much if the words are well placed. So, believing that God wasn't telling them the whole story, Adam and Eve set their minds on how good the fruit of that tree would taste, and how great it would be to be like God, and to know good from evil, and how unfair God was for not letting them have what they thought they should have been given all along. And we read about their life before the devil's effort with them, and we see that they had a great relationship with God, they trusted Him, they loved Him, they knew He loved them, they knew that He gave them many, many blessings – a great job, a great place to live, a great mate, great everything! But maybe, because they never had known any other way, maybe they took it for granted, somewhat the way we take for granted the wealth that we have in this nation. So, whether that was so or not, the point is that once they started thinking God was unfair, gratefulness, thankfulness, appreciation, realization of the blessings went out the window.

Thankfulness and resentment do *not* fit together. It's a very important thing. You can't be thankful and resentful at the same time. And the more resentful we are, the less thankful we will be. And the less thankful we are, the closer we become to resentment. And the closer to resentment we get, the closer we are to bitterness.

So, thinking about all this helps us see how important it is for us to understand what things separate us from the devil, with his deep resentment of God, and hatred for all that God has created, including you and me, and how lacking in gratefulness he is for what God had given him. He forgot all those things too, once he started getting bitter.

So, gratefulness then is the biblical defense against bitterness – maybe the greatest defense. If when bitter we can't be thankful, it follows that when thankful, we can't be bitter, doesn't it?

So, anyone can use this tool – this weapon – and everyone should. Has God blessed us? Well, yes, He has! So, to forget that is to be out of touch with reality. So, I said earlier that gratefulness and resentment don't fit together. We can be both resentful and grateful, but not at the same time.

So, to drive resentment or anger and the ensuing bitterness out of hearts, we can do it by practicing gratitude to God. That's how to stay strong in the faith. Think about the book of Psalms. The vast majority of the psalms are prayer primers to help us remember to praise and

thank God for His plan, and His ways, and His blessings. It's not that God needs to be constantly reassured of His greatness or flattered – a sagging ego that needs to be bolstered up. He doesn't want to have a family of sycophants either. It's not that God is a narcissist who needs to be lauded. No! God wants us to praise and thank Him for His blessings because it helps us. It helps us to be strong in the faith and to love God. It ups the chances that we will make the right choice to stay loyal to God and then enter eternal life, which is the point of the whole creation.

So, why does God tell us to be thankful? We can't see God or hear Him. So, it's hard for us, because we can't, sometimes, figure out what He's doing or understand His plan completely.

Let's look at a biblical case in point. It's in Hebrews 11 – Paul again says – starting in verse 36 – about God's people:

Hebrews 11:36 – *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* So, why be thankful for that? Or, for our trials that we have in this day? You know, we don't have so many trials of persecution at this point, but we have lots of health trials, don't we, in this country – one of the most unhealthy nations in the world, even though we're the richest.

Well, let's read what James tells us in 1, verse 2:

James 1:2-4 – *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect....* Okay, so you're steadfast in the faith. What does that cause? What's the full effect? ...*that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Now, that doesn't mean not lacking in money, or a nice car. It means lacking in nothing that you need to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Every hard thing that happens to us prepares us what's ahead. That's God getting us ready. God tells us to meditate on Him. So, let's do a meditation right now. Okay, you ready? Let's think about our thumb. Let's meditate on our thumbs. How much good would your hand be without your thumb? Well, they'd be like flippers with fingers. You couldn't pick anything up very well. You might be able to wrap your fingers around something, but there would be nothing opposing your fingers to really get a grip on things. So, how did that happen – that we all have thumbs? Well, some people would say evolution. They would say that, if we needed a thumb to survive at some point in the evolutionary process, we would all have died in a generation or two before our thumbs evolved, not over millions of years. So, it's crazy! If we didn't need it to survive, there would probably be no biological pressure to drive the evolution, right? So, it's all so stupid! Remember, everyone, in the fairy tale, was acting as though the king had clothes on, until a child said it out loud, "The king has no clothes!"

So, to let us know He's real, God has created everything we see – astounding things! Think about the people in the world, with all their motives, and their plans, and their dreams, and their efforts, and their talents – billions of them! – and expanding that out to the planet we live on, and how fantastic that is – how diverse, how well-balanced.... And that's just one particle among quadrillions, right, that we know of. So, how did all that happen? And why did it happen? Why are we here? Well, no matter of what some people have convinced themselves – that this is all an accident – we can know that it's not. We can know that there's a purpose being derived from the universe. God is driving it to an end product. And He tells us the conclusion of all that we see, and all that we experience, and all the grandness of it is the inclusion of all of us – billions of us – into His family. That's the goal. That's His goal. Everything. All of it. It's all about sharing eternal life with us. I mean, He's pretty committed, isn't He? And He tells us that everything that happens to us – good and bad – He is turning into something that moves us toward His purpose, which is eternal life for us in His family. And that is done – the motive for all of that is that He created us, and He loves us. When bad things happen along with good, God turns it all to good in the end. And so, we can be thankful, even for hard things, if we see the bigger picture – if we take the long view.

None of these awesome blessings could be ours. The universe would be built to no end, because sin and eternal life don't go together either. And we have all sinned. We, on our own, deserve nothing but death. But has taken care of that too, hasn't He? Christ died to pay for our sins. Can you imagine someone from the other world – the world of heaven – giving up eternal life to come down here and suffer and die for us? That's what Jesus did. He divested Himself of His deity – not easily. It was very hard. So, how would any of us like to die the way Christ died? But God solved that problem too, out of great expense, out of love for us.

Since we exist to join God's eternal family, everything else is only important as it pertains to that goal. Nothing else matters! We can be grateful for everything that happens in our lives.

Gratefulness, then, is an expression of faith. It's not just that we're pleased or happy that something happened. It's an expression of our faith – that we know where all that comes from and where it's all going. And Paul tells us, “Without faith, it's impossible to please God.” Why is that? It's not that He needs us to believe in Him out of some insecurity of His, but because we won't go somewhere that we don't believe exists and we can't be something we don't believe we can be.

So, let's go back to the question: Can the devil be grateful? Once faith is ours, gratefulness is the logical response to the blessings and trials that God gives us. Gratefulness is something God's children feel toward Him, because of His loving plan for us. And that means that the devil wouldn't be the devil if he were grateful. That's what separates him from us. He can't be grateful. He would be a happy member of God's family *if* he were a grateful being. And, if we're grateful, we won't be the devil's children. We will be God's.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.

I'd like to take a moment to thank all those who have been contributing to this work. We're very grateful to you for it. We're in our 20th year. It's amazing how time has flown, but we couldn't have done all that without your help. And we believe God laid it on your heart to help us, so we thank you for all that you have done.