



## Satan's Designs

No. 6  
Series: 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

July 5, 2026  
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### Text

<sup>5</sup> Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. <sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

### Introduction

September 1, 1939 – Germany invaded Poland.

September 3, 1939 – France and the U.K. declared war on Germany. WWII had officially begun, one of the most destructive armed conflicts of all time with massive consequences for humanity on the line.

And yet, for the first 8 months it looked like nothing was happening. There were no major battles. British pilots, tasked with flying over the German line to map it, were met with friendly hand waves. The allies were told that they were at war, but it didn't seem like it to many of their citizens or even some of their political leaders. In fact, it became known during this period as the "Phoney War." *We're not really in a war. There's nothing dangerous here. You can go on with life as normal.*

But meanwhile Hitler's Germany was scheming, plotting, devising, maneuvering – replenishing supplies and preparing for their full-scale invasion of France. Many people were lulled into complacency and denial during the so-called Phoney War. They were oblivious, but they were nonetheless still very much at war.

The Bible depicts us as living in a world at war, the two sides being the kingdom of God and the spiritual forces of evil, with their respective subjects (e.g. Eph. 6:10ff). It says that there is an invisible evil being named Satan who has legions of demons in league with him. And their aim is nothing less than total world domination. They seek to steal, kill, and destroy (Jn. 10:10). They are intent on the ruin of humanity. This is intense. This is real.

And yet many people think this is a phoney war. *There is no real threat. There is nothing to worry about. We can just go on living as if it's not happening.* How foolish! The spiritual realm is no joke. And the stakes could not be higher.

At the Summer Retreat in a couple weeks Pastor Theo, Lord-willing, is going to give us a more in-depth treatment of this topic of spiritual warfare. There is a lot we can

say about Satan and his armies. He deploys many different tactics and is attacking on multiple fronts – sometimes with a frontal assault, sometimes with a more subtle approach that dupes us into not thinking we’re at war. If you’ve never read C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*, written as an imagined correspondence between a senior demon and a junior demon discussing strategy, I’d recommend it. It could open your eyes.

But the most important and clear source of information into this spiritual realm is the Bible itself, where we find passages like today’s in 2 Corinthians where we read instructions given “so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (v. 11). Do you see that there in v. 11? Here we are given divine communication alerting us to Satan’s plans so that we can be prepared to resist him. We don’t have to be caught unawares. We don’t have to give up territory to him. We can take our stand against the Devil.

Now, I’m talking primarily to Christians here today, those who have been “delivered... from the domain of darkness and transferred... to the kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). If that’s not you, it can be! That’s the Good News. We’re so glad you’re here. But Satan’s not. He’s going to be doing everything he can to keep you in his grip, to distract you, to deceive you, to dupe you, to confuse you. But God’s Word brings light and clarity. Let’s look at it together today.

In short, what we’re going to see from this section of Scripture is just this: that **Satan’s main objective is to obscure the glory of Christ**. That will become clear as we are alerted to three of his chief strategies in this text. Before we look at those three Satanic strategies...

*Let’s pray...*

### **Satanic Strategy #1 – Get Churches to Fight and Fall Apart**

Here’s the scenario, the background behind this letter: Paul helped to plant this church in Corinth. He loved them, genuinely. They had a piece of his heart. He wrote them 1 Corinthians when he heard of some problems they were having and to answer some questions they had sent him. Things didn’t get all cleared up by that letter, so he made an impromptu visit to try to help. But that went disastrously. It was painful – that was the word he used to describe it. More drama ensued. Paul left quickly and instead of coming back again as he had originally planned, he sent a tearful letter (referenced in last week’s text).

Let’s just be real: sometimes church community can involve a lot of pain and heartache. But it’s worth it! It’s worth it! Stick it out. Don’t just live for immediate comfort and give up on the church, even if it’s painful at times. Here’s the reality: because of human sin, non-Christian communities are also marked by pain and conflict. So it’s not like you can find the perfect community you long for elsewhere. But in the church, even though there is still human sin and Satanic opposition there is Holy Spirit power. In the midst of deep pain you can see God work and experience an even more profound kind of community. So Paul stuck it out with these Corinthians. He pushed through the pain. He wasn’t going to let Satan win and the church fall apart.

That’s what Satan loves – for churches to fight each other and fizzle out. Conflict, division, disintegration... nothing makes Satan happier than when a church is

distracted from their mission and eventually disperses. I've seen this many times: churches be racked with drama and dissension and dissolve. Let's be aware of Satan's designs in disrupting unity in a church. That's Satanic Strategy #1 – get churches to fight and fall apart. Don't be tricked by him and play into his hand. Stick it out with church, work through your disappointments or church hurts. Don't get disillusioned. What part can you play in preserving the unity of this church?

Churches are demonstrations of the reality of Christ to the world. **Satan's main objective is to obscure the glory of Christ**, so it makes sense that he would love to snuff churches out. We can see that Satanic strategy just from the overall situation at Corinth.

### **Satanic Strategy #2 – Get Churches to Not Take Sin Seriously**

But you know there is a kind of fake unity that Satan is also fine with? He's okay if a church can keep going, if the drama dies down a little and there's a peace, as long as it's a peace that is purchased at the cost of compromise. If he can't get a church to fight and fall apart then he will try to get a church to not take sin seriously. That is Satanic strategy #2 that we see here in this passage – get churches to not take sin seriously. Look at vv. 5 and 6.

Paul says, "Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure – not to put it too severely – to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough." There is an unnamed someone who has been at the epicenter of all this drama and pain. The details are a bit hazy. Who was this person? What did he do? Some kind of sin, a sin that pained Paul, but also affected the whole community. And this sin had to be dealt with by the church. It couldn't just be swept under the rug. They couldn't pretend it wasn't a thing and look the other way.

Most ancient interpreters have seen this unnamed someone in 2 Corinthians 2 as the guy in 1 Corinthians 5 who was sleeping with his stepmother and that Paul urged them to exercise church discipline on. Most modern interpreters have said it was not that guy but someone else, perhaps someone who personally attacked Paul when he visited the last time. It's impossible to know for sure. There are good arguments for both positions. Let's not get too hung up on identifying the exact person in mind, but pay attention to the principles we can learn from what Paul does say here.

Notice the principle of profound spiritual interconnectedness reflected in Paul's words. No man is an island. What I do is never just about my life; I'm part of a community. This is especially true within the church. One person's sins affect the whole body. It can't be contained. It's inevitable. This concept of radical commonality is foreign to our American individualism today. But as Kent Hughes points out, "Paul would never have countenanced the free-riding ecclesiastical hitch-hikers of today, much less the McChurch consumers who attend one church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for the youth group, and participate in another church's small groups – people who [try to] live without commitment, without accountability, without discipline... For Paul, the [local] church was central to Christian existence. He never conceived of Christians living apart from the visible church. Rather, Christians lived in such profound relationship that the pain of one was truly felt by all."<sup>1</sup> Do you see that here?

Do you see things that way yourself? That your Christianity is bound up with the church and that we're all in this together? Or is this just like another voluntary

association, a club to you that you're in as long as there's something in it for you? And if it gets too complicated or too in your business or asks you to get too into other people's business, you're out?

Paul says that this unnamed someone's sin was a cancer in the body that had to be dealt with. And so this leads to the next principle we find here – the principle of church discipline. We know from 1 Corinthians 5 that Paul taught the Corinthian church the necessity of church discipline – of officially removing renowned and unrepentant sinners from membership in the church. Whether this here is referring to that same guy or another example, it's clear that the same practice is being referenced. At Paul's behest, they had excommunicated this flagrant offender.

Sometimes people will ask, "Where do you see church membership in the Bible?" Or, "Where is voting found in the Bible?" Well church membership is mentioned or reflected several places in the NT. But it's clearly implied here. Think about that phrase – "the majority." Mathematically, a majority requires a defined, finite set. For example, 49 or more is a majority of 97. To find the majority you have to know what the total is. And that's church membership: the total number of those who are recognized as part of this body. And how do you determine if a majority is in favor of some action? You have a vote, where each member's decision is declared and can be tallied up somehow.

As one scholar states the matter – "It is difficult not to envisage, especially with the use of the technical legal terms ['punishment' in v. 6 and 'reaffirm' later in v. 8], some formal gathering of the whole Corinthian church where a deliberative decision was made that was approved and carried out by the majority." So church membership meetings with voting is right there in the Bible. Furthermore, as this scholar points out, "Paul recognized that the exercise of church discipline was a function of the local church, not of an apostle, who belonged to the universal church. And to be effective, discipline in the local church must be agreed upon and implemented by the majority [of] the whole body, not imposed by the few," like just the elders.<sup>2</sup> No, the whole church has to vote to make this decision.

I'm geeking out a little on church polity particulars (forgive me), but please don't miss the larger point. It was necessary that the church take sin seriously and make a public pronouncement that certain habitual behaviors by members are unacceptable and incompatible with a Christian profession of faith. This is really hard to get people to do, especially these days. We don't like the idea of church discipline. We don't want to be mean. We don't want to take a firm stand. We're afraid of offending people. And so we let things slide. We make excuses. We are loath to bring someone before the church and state clearly that what they are doing is wrong and remove them from membership and bar them from the Lord's Table. That seems wrong.

And that's straight from Satan's playbook. Get a church to be unwilling to take a stand. Make them think that love = permissiveness. Get them to buy cheap grace. Make them wishy-washy, allowing and then even endorsing all manner of wickedness. Get them to offer belonging with no expectations. Get them to confuse accountability with legalism. Uncouple repentance from faith. But brothers and sisters: we are called to guard the purity of the church, to keep the lines between the world and the church sharp and defined so Jesus is clear to the world. **Satan's main objective is to obscure the glory of Christ**, right? And he can do this by getting churches to not take sin seriously. What does it offer the world if the church is just like the world?

Personal temptation works like this: highlight the immediate thrill and rush of something forbidden while **obscuring the glory of Christ**, so that you aren't mesmerized, dazzled by his beauty. Jesus seems more and more faint, fuzzy, unreal. His designation of this behavior as sin seems unfair, doesn't make sense, not that big of a deal. And before you know it, you're all in to sin and Jesus rests lightly on your conscience if at all. That's Satan's work. But when the glory of Jesus is blazing at the center of your vision, especially his love displayed at the Cross in taking the eternal punishment your sin deserves for you, then sin becomes a horror to you. How can you coddle something that killed your Jesus? You want to get away from it with disgust. Is that how you're living? Do you have a clear vision of the worth and value and glory of Jesus and thus the seriousness of sin? Or are you getting comfortable with sin? Satan is way more active in your life than you think.

And then this temptation spreads corporately. When churches collectively lose sight of the **glory of Christ** then sin gets accommodated. Jesus is no longer the holy Lover who hates sin, but loves us so much that he would take upon himself the horrific consequences of sin to pay for them to purchase our forgiveness at infinite cost. He becomes a pathetic, wimpy affirmer of us in whatever we want. And then in that mindset it becomes inconceivable that someone would be called out for their sin or even put out of the fellowship because of their insistence to walk in sin. And then you get churches that proudly fly rainbow flags in June. Or that don't practice meaningful membership and church discipline and just try to cater to people's felt needs. And Satan laughs with delight. He's okay with so-called churches that don't take sin seriously, but are just bland little social clubs with no power.

### **Satanic Strategy #3 – Get Churches to Not Forgive**

So there is a spiritual battle going on for the souls of men. This is a war of infinitely higher stakes than the Revolutionary War or Civil War or World War or Cold War. Satan would love to get churches to in-fight and fall apart. If he can't do that, then he'd love to get them to not take sin seriously. But if he can't do that, then he has another trick up his sleeve.

The church at Corinth, followed through and exercised church discipline. Praise God. They brought this person's sin before the church and they acted formally as a church to punish, to censure, to discipline him. That was hard. That was a spiritual battle. But God's Spirit prevailed. Satan lost that one. The church did what was right and barred the unrepentant sinner from membership and the Lord's Table. But not so fast. The Satanic attempt to **obscure the glory of Christ** is not over. A church that practices church discipline is not out of the woods of Satanic attack. Satanic strategy #3 – get churches to not forgive. Get them to be harsh, self-righteous, legalistic, instead of gracious, merciful, and gospel-loving.

What is the goal of church discipline? To get rid of anyone who stumbles and sins and say *Sayonara* and hope to never see them again? No, no, no. That's a Satanic distortion of church discipline. If he can't make a church liberal and soft, he'll make a church hyper-conservative and all about the Law without any gospel. That's a win for him too, because it obscures the glory of Christ because what is the apex, the pinnacle of the glory of Christ but his abundant mercy and grace to sinners who see their sin and turn to him in humble faith? What kind of God is like that? There is no other. It is his glory

to forgive. Not just forgive with a wave of a hand, but to forgive while maintaining the heinousness of sin; that is, to forgive on account of the Cross.

And so the goal of church discipline is to awaken people again to the glory of Christ, to make them feel the misery of sin and turn afresh to the mercy of the Savior. Our goal in church discipline must never be to get rid of people, but to get their attention. That's why Paul writes that the "punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him [remember that wonderful word "comfort" from ch. 1?]." Think about what the church in Corinth is dealing with. As someone has put it, they are hesitant "to exercise church discipline against an unrepentant sinner [in 1Cor. 5]. And then when it finally steps up to its responsibility and does it, it finds it difficult to forgive and restore the repentant sinner."<sup>3</sup>

They were now tempted by a kind of cruel enjoyment of seeing someone suffer. Fellow believers: that cannot be. Paul writes to them to tell them they "should rather turn to forgive and comfort [the disciplined person], or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." There must be sorrow for sin. But once that is felt and the person is sorry, the church should be quick to apply the comfort of the gospel. We don't want people to wallow in sadness, but to know the joy of God's embrace. John Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed preacher from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, said that "[s]ome Satan destroys through sin, others through the unmeasured sorrow following on repentance for it."<sup>4</sup> Satan loves it when sinners are miserable and don't experience the joy of restoration. Anything **to obscure the glory of Christ.**

"So," Paul says, "I beg you to reaffirm your love for him." "Reaffirm" is a legal term, suggesting a reinstatement to full membership. It worked! He repented. Oh, how sweet it is when disciplined members come to their senses and come back and the church welcomes them with the open arms of God's love and restores them to Table fellowship. This totally thwarts Satan's designs. John Calvin commented on this text saying, "Severity is required in order that wicked men may not be made more bold by being allowed to go unpunished – for this is rightly said to be an enticement to sin. But on the other hand there is a danger that a man who is disciplined will fall into despair so that the Church must practice moderation and be ready to pardon anyone as soon as it is sure that he has sincerely repented."<sup>5</sup>

Paul goes on – "For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything." "The object of their obedience... is not the fortification of Paul's ego but the edification of the church,"<sup>6</sup> Also, "[i]t should be noticed that the Apostle *exhorts*, but does not order, them to display their love, for love cannot be commanded," as someone has put it.<sup>7</sup>

Paul understands the seriousness of sin, but also the sweetness of forgiveness of sin in Christ. He wants the Corinthians to feel this same way too. "Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ." If this unnamed someone was a troublemaker for Paul who defied and denigrated him publicly on his last visit, then this statement becomes even more profound. Paul forgives him! And he wants the church to as well. "In the presence of Christ." This is what Jesus himself would want. This is his heart. He is full of forgiveness for sorrowful sinners who know they need forgiveness. He is truly the Friend of sinners (Mt. 11:19).

How about you? Can you have someone hurt you in the worst way, and then receive them back with fervor when they repent? Only if **the glory of Christ** is clearly in your view. Only in the presence of Christ. Only if you're not seeing red, but seeing the blood of Christ that covers even your sins. Oh, Satan loves to make people hold onto grudges and bitterness and unforgiveness, to become consumed with rage and a desire for revenge. "Given the way Satan [plots] for the disunity of the church, forgiveness and reconciliation provide beautiful [counter-]strategies for disrupting his evil, church-dissolving schemes."<sup>8</sup> Paul models and encourages forgiveness and then comes v. 11 where he says "so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

## Conclusion

**Satan's main objective is to obscure the glory of Christ.** And he has many strategies to do that. Satan's first strategy is to get churches to fight and fall apart. If he can't do that, then he wants to get them to not take sin seriously. If he can't do that, then he'll try to get them to not forgive. But Paul says, "I'm fighting for you. I'm not going to give up. The church is worth it." And then he says, "You've gotta discipline. You can't just let sin slide." But then he adds – "But you've also gotta forgive. You can't just become a community that is clobbering each other and holding out impossible standards with no room for grace." Satan would love for people to be floaters, unattached to a church. Or if not that, then let them be part of affirming churches that have no category for sin other than their definition of intolerance. Or if not that, then get them to be Pharisees who don't think they need forgiveness and don't love to extend forgiveness to others.

One commentator explains it like this: "Satan can be behind both moral laxity – anything goes – and a callous inflexibility – everyone goes who does not toe the line. Satan can use the church's permissiveness in failing to chastise sinners in their midst to bring it to ruin, and he can use the church's rigidity in failing to forgive chastened sinners to bring it to ruin."<sup>9</sup>

Someone else writes this: "Discipline which is so inflexible as to leave no place for repentance and reconciliation has ceased to be truly Christian; for it is no less a scandal to cut off the penitent sinner from all hope of re-entry into the comfort and security of the fellowship of the redeemed community than it is to permit flagrant wickedness to continue unpunished in the Body of Christ. The Christian who falls into sin, however deplorable his sin may be, may still look to Jesus Christ the Righteous as his Advocate with the Father."<sup>10</sup>

That's **the glory of Christ**! Oh, how glorious!! What a God who "so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:16). This is his glory! As Paul will say a little later in ch. 4, Satan seeks to "blind... the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." But I'm here to proclaim to you his excellencies. See the glory of Jesus!

In Christ, we have a forgiving God! Did you notice how many times that word forgiveness is found in this passage? I see five times. It's the overwhelming note. Not punishment, but forgiveness. Once "when a leading British humanist was interviewed on

television, in a moment of surprising frankness, she said, “What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness. I have nobody to forgive me.”<sup>11</sup> Oh how sad, to have a sense that you’ve done things that are wrong, but not have any way of experiencing forgiveness. This is the Good News of Christianity. This is what Jesus is ultimately all about. He is riveting, ravishing, like the most spectacular fireworks explosion... that never ends. Behold him and ooh and awe.

There is an Enemy of your soul that seeks to dull your senses and obscure your view of him. This is war. It’s not a phoney war, but very real. But we’ve been let in on the Enemy’s strategy today. You don’t have to be caught unawares.

### **The Lord’s Table**

Participating in the Lord’s Table is a powerful way to stand up to Satan. It says, “I’m part of this body and I’m stuck together with them no matter what.” It says, “Sin is serious, my sin is serious, so serious that it took nothing less than the crucifixion of the only innocent one to save me – his body broken and blood shed on the Cross.” And it says, “But he forgives me, not based on my effort but his grace.” And as we eat together the glory of Christ becomes more vivid to our souls and Satan’s designs are foiled.

### **Benediction**

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1Pe. 5:8-11).

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, July 5, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 228.

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, 48.

<sup>4</sup> As qtd. in R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974 [1958]), 55.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Calvin’s Commentaries, trans. by T.A. Small (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 68.

<sup>8</sup> George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 137.

<sup>9</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Brentwood: B&H, 1999), 132.

<sup>10</sup> Philip E. Hughes, 66-67.

<sup>11</sup> Guthrie, 134, referencing a quote from John R.W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 48