

False Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Today, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just pray once again that you would speak to us. We thank you that your word is living and active, that it is as powerful as a two-edged sword, that it is able to pierce our hearts in a good way, to break us but also to heal us, so that we might live for you and we might truly glorify you in all that we do.

So I pray, Lord, that you would not let your word go unheard today, but that it would achieve its purpose that you sent it for. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The novel I've most enjoyed so far this year is an award-winning novel by a Japanese author called Mashiro Imamura. I would love to tell you more about it another time, because I think it's really good.

But for our purposes this morning, all you need to know is that this story has some students trapped in a remote countryside mansion, and there are zombies trying to get in.

And the zombies are relentless. Because the zombies never have to sleep, they never stop. They keep coming and coming, trying to push through the barricades that the students have set up.

[1 : 2 6] 24 hours round the clock, they are always looking for an opening. Their stamina is unlimited. And if one of the zombies breaks through, that would almost certainly mean death for our students.

So until rescue comes, the characters have to try to keep the zombies from entering. And my brothers and sisters, that's the story of the Christian life too.

You see, sin is like a pack of zombies. It's relentless. It never stops. It's always pushing against you, even if you set up barricades against it.

It's always looking for an opening, 24 hours a day, to get you looking at things you shouldn't look at, moving your lips to say things you shouldn't say, planting certain thoughts in your minds that you know you shouldn't think, stopping you from doing the things you know you should do.

It just keeps coming and coming, even in our best moments. As the Apostle Paul lamented in Romans 7 verse 21, on the screen, so I find this law or principle at work, although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

[2 : 5 4] Even in those moments where he wanted to serve and obey God, Paul discovered sin was already his companion, always looking for an opportunity to cause him great spiritual harm.

It never rests. And so that's why the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, once said, deal with sin as it would deal with you.

Spare it not, for it will not spare you. It is your murderer, and the murderer of the world. Deal with it, therefore, as a murderer should be dealt with.

Kill it before it kills you. And though it bring you to the grave, as it did Christ your head, it shall not be able to keep you there forever.

So if we are Christians, we must fight this enemy, because it will never leave us alone this side of eternity. But what is the first step in fighting this enemy?

[4 : 01] Here, the ancient Chinese military strategist, Sun Zhe, can help us. In his work, The Art of War, he famously wrote, If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

In other words, the better you know what your enemy is like, the better prepared you would be in battle. And that's what this mini-sermon series, starting today, is going to be all about.

You see, when we study God's Word, we discover that the Bible doesn't just describe sin in just one way. Instead, it gives us a variety of angles.

So for instance, 1 John 3 verse 4 thinks of sin as lawlessness. Isaiah 1 verse 2 labels it as rebellion.

Proverbs 19 verse 2 defines sin in terms of missing the mark. Ephesians 4 verse 18 characterizes it as hardness of heart. Sin is multifaceted.

[5 : 10] So what we're going to do over the next four weeks is to look at four angles, or images in particular, to explore the different ways sin operates so that we will be more ready for his tricks.

So that's the introduction to the series as a whole, but let's now jump straight into the first of these images today. You can see on the screen this morning that we're going to be thinking about sin as false faith.

Sin as false faith. And I want to begin by getting you to think about scams. They've been in the news quite a bit over the past year or so, haven't they?

Perhaps you've even received a scam call or two yourself. I certainly have. Just as an aside, when a scammer recently WhatsApped me, trying to persuade me to do what he wanted me to do, I decided to have some fun and just quoted a verse from Ecclesiastes back to him just to see what he would say.

He never replied. But anyway, you see, in the past, those scams often took the form of some supposed Nigerian prince writing you an email claiming that they need to transfer millions of dollars out of your country and offering you a handsome commission if you help them out.

[6 : 40] All you need to do is to give them your bank account number or make some advance payments to cover things like taxes or bank fees. And if that's what you did, well, say bye-bye to your money.

Now, when we read such stories, my guess is that many of us would shake our heads and laugh how silly these people are to fall for such things.

We would never be so easily tricked. We're immune to such scams, we like to think. We know what's true and what's false. We know who to place our faith in and who not to place our faith in.

It's obvious. But spiritually speaking, should we be so sure of ourselves? After all, right from the beginning of their existence, Adam and Eve knew who they could place their faith in.

It's obvious. The evidence was all around them as they soak in God's good world. The waves that crash across the sandy shoreline, the trees that tower towards the sun, the fluffy clouds that float in the sky all revealed a meaningful and perfectly ordered world.

[8 : 04] And so the richness of the sunsets, the twinkle of the stars, and the sheer diversity of the animal kingdom all bore witness to a creator God who is good and beautiful in himself.

And from the very beginning, this good and beautiful God wants to do good to us. He creates us to know us in order to bless us.

He blesses our endeavors in Genesis 1 verse 29 to 31, which we heard in our Bible reading earlier, as he gives us every fruitful tree, and every seed-bearing plant, trees that are pleasing to the eye, nourished by ever-flowing rivers, and he gives Adam and Eve to each other, creating that perfect, one-flesh relationship that humankind still dream about to this very day.

What a good and generous God we have. So, it's obvious who Adam and Eve should place their faith in, isn't it?

It's obvious who we humans should trust. But what happens next should sober us. In Genesis 3 verse 1, for the first time, another character appears, the serpent.

[9 : 35] We are never told his origins. Later on in the Bible, he's associated with Satan, though not at this point in the story. Here, he's a mere creature identified with the created animal kingdom, not the creator.

And we're simply told one thing about him. Verse 1 again. He's very crafty. He's a brilliant scam artist.

And here's the thing about the best scam artists. They know how to work the game. They know how to earn your trust. I was reading the other day of a professional who prided herself on not falling for scams.

But one day, she received a call from someone claiming to be a debt collector working on behalf of Hong Leong Bank, claiming that a suit would be filed against her in a matter of hours if she didn't repay a RM50,000 loan.

The scammer then transferred the call to the Penang police station and even got her to do verification checks to prove that she is indeed calling the Penang HQ police number.

[10 : 50] On the other end, the so-called sergeant tells her initially, don't share your password with me, just share your bank account balance, because policemen, we don't ask for such details.

So you can see it's all very elaborate and sophisticated, designed to win her confidence and earn her trust, so that she would eventually hand over the important details.

And she was fooled right up to the very last moment. That's what the best scam artists do. They get us to put our faith in them.

So that's what this serpent is like. He wants to win our confidence and our trust. He's crafty. And like most scam artists, he has a certain script he wants to sell us.

He continues to scam us today in essentially the same way he scammed Adam and Eve. He has no new tricks. So how can we protect ourselves?

[11 : 57] Well, surely the answer would be to keep our Bibles open to Genesis 3 verse 1 to 7 right now and study the script this crafty scam artist uses.

And as we do that, what we discover is that Sin's script has three key statements that's essential to his entire scam operation. And so let's examine this script by looking at these three statements.

Here's the first statement. Did God really say? Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

Now, at first glance, this isn't a great opening line from a supposedly great scam artist. After all, the answer is straightforward, right? No, God didn't say that at all.

Get lost, you scammer. No, dear. Rookie mistake. Come on, even the Nigerian prince was more convincing. Sorry, serpent, you've got to go back to scammer school and do better next time.

[13 : 07] After all, it doesn't look like Eve's been conned at all. Doesn't she basically reject the serpent's suggestion in verse 2?

But hang on a minute, the Bible has just told us that the serpent is more crafty than any other creature. So that tells us we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss him.

After all, it's pretty clear that the serpent knows what God said back in Genesis 2, verse 16 to 17 on the screen. And the Lord God commanded the man, can you flash the verse on the screen please?

And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die.

The serpent knows this, and the serpent knows Eve knows what God said. So he knows that starting with a direct challenge won't work. Instead, what he does is put a question mark on what God says.

[14 : 22] Did God really say Eve? He's like the defense lawyer, asking some neutral-sounding factual questions, so that doubt begins to grow in the mind of the jury as to the character of the witness.

Now, don't forget what Genesis 1 and 2 have told us, that God has heaped nothing but blessing after blessing on his creation. But the serpent cleverly narrows our focus not on his blessing, but on the ban.

Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? In other words, Eve, isn't God a killjoy?

Isn't he so mean, so harsh, so restrictive, that he won't let you eat from any of the trees? Oh, isn't that just so like him? A God who doesn't bless, but merely puts up barriers.

Now, of course, verse 2, God says no. But notice, she is being drawn in. She is beginning to buy into the serpent's insinuations.

[15 : 43] Look a little closer at how she says no. Verse 2, the woman said to the serpent, we may eat from the trees in the garden, but God did say, you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.

Now, compare what she says to Genesis 2, verse 16. We can have it back on the screen. God says you are free to eat from any tree.

Fig trees, plum trees, apricot trees, you name it. But the words free and any have dropped out of Eve's answer.

Instead, notice what has replaced it. And you must not touch it, or you will die. Now, where in Genesis 2, verse 16, or 17, did God ever say that?

Answer, nowhere. But Eve's words are revealing. They show she's beginning to see God more negatively. And this gives us insight into the scam artist's modus operandi.

[17 : 03] Do you see how sin works? The first thing it does is to get you and I to view God differently. Sin knows that you know what God said you should do or shouldn't do.

So it doesn't start there. Instead, it whispers into your ear, isn't God such a killjoy? Isn't he really rigid, harsh, repressive?

It gets you so fixated on the tree that you literally miss the lush forest that is before you. As the pastor Graham Bannon puts it, God gave one no in a whole world of yeses.

But the snake turns his words into a whole world of noes. That's what sin does. It makes you lose sight of God's goodness.

In effect, sin depersonalizes God. Just look back at Genesis 2, particularly in places like verses 4, 7, 8, 15, 18.

[18 : 12] And notice how is God consistently described? As the Lord God. The Lord in capitals, or Yahweh is his personal name.

The name by which he enters into a covenant relationship with his people and blesses them. But notice how the serpent speaks of God in 3, verse 1.

he never uses the Lord God. He never says Yahweh. Instead, it is just God. And that's because he doesn't want to remind you and I in any way that our God is personal and good and beautiful.

And you know the woman is beginning to buy in. Verse 3, when she too simply refers to God in the same way as the serpent.

What about you and I? When you see how Eve responds here, do you begin to recognize yourself? I certainly do.

[19 : 21] After all, think about how we often respond when sin knocks at our door. We say, no. but even as we do, we can't help but think we are saying no to something good.

We've lost sight of Genesis 1 and 2. We're beginning to believe the lie that what God forbids is what brings joy to us. And God wants to keep us from joy.

We say to ourselves, I would indulge in that sin, but deep down in our hearts, there is a resentment that's beginning to build up against God because we're thinking, well, that's God for you, stopping me from being happy again.

And that's the lie sin wants us to believe. Sin wants us to have faith in an ungenerous God, a God that doesn't exist in reality.

It's false faith. faith. And when we are at this stage, we are ripe to be scammed further. For now, sin can whisper to us, you will not certainly die.

[20 : 36] That's the second statement sin makes to us. Actually, why don't you go ahead, sin encourages us. Gossip without restraint.

Vent out your anger unreservedly. Stay bitter. Don't forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Spend your money only on yourself. Visit that pornographic website.

There will be no consequences. Not really. You'll get away with this. You won't ever be held accountable. God doesn't really see. Or if he does, he doesn't take it that seriously.

It's no big deal. He's got other worse sinners to deal with. Doesn't he? Adam and Eve are faced with a choice.

It's interesting that so far in Genesis, there have only been three people speaking. In Genesis 1, God speaks.

[21 : 35] What happens when he speaks? A good world is spoken into being. Blessing is pronounced over creation. In Genesis 2, God speaks again.

What happens this time when he speaks? He promises Adam a helper completely suitable for him and he fulfills that promise. His words are filled with nothing but goodness and truth.

And that's why in Genesis 2, when Adam speaks, he overflows with praise of God's provision of a helper. But now in Genesis 3, it is the serpent who speaks.

And all he does is insinuate this one. And now he directly contradicts what God says back in chapter 2. Eat the fruit and you will die, God said.

But now the serpent says, eat the fruit and you will not die. So it's one or the other. Whose words are right?

[22 : 46] Who is trustworthy? Who should you place your faith in? The answer should be obvious. But you see, when sin gets you nodding your head, when he says, isn't God a killjoy?

It's not such a big step when he then asks you, isn't God untrustworthy? Isn't he someone who doesn't always follow through on his word?

Isn't he someone who only threatens judgment but never actually executes it? That's what so many people in the world believe, isn't it? And that's what we can believe too.

When we too decide that, well, let's be more selfish with our time and our energy, and when we do so, hmm, nothing bad happens. We go to that website, and well, no harm done to anybody.

Maybe we don't have to take the Lord God at his word after all. He says, there are consequences, but hey, I don't seem to be suffering them.

[23 : 55] So I guess God isn't that trustworthy after all. Here is false faith at work again. But just in case we are still wavering, sin moves in for the kill by presenting himself as generous and offering an alternative reward.

And so we have our third statement, your eyes will be opened. Verse 5. Look, the serpent whispers, God is a liar, he's untrustworthy, and here is why.

there's something he's holding back from you. There's something he doesn't want you to know. But hey, look at me, I'm so good to you, aren't I? I want your eyes to be open.

I'm not holding it back from you. That's why I want you to eat the fruit. And notice, technically speaking, the serpent is proven right.

As Adam and Eve listen to the serpent and by the way, verse 6 shows us that Adam is present too. As they act sinfully, their eyes are indeed open.

[25 : 10] Verse 7, they did gain something that they didn't know before, down in 3, verse 22. But what the serpent doesn't say is what they will lose.

For what happens as they open their eyes? sin is they see only their nakedness and with it the burden of human guilt and shame for the very first time.

They know evil, all right, because now they have personally experienced it for the very first time. That's the plain truth.

Sin always over-promises and under-delivers. It hides the cost to you in the fine print. But sin is relentless in its false advertising.

It constantly whispers to us, hey, isn't God holding you back? Doesn't he just want to keep you down because, well, he doesn't want you to be like him?

[26 : 17] But here's the irony of the statement. If we have read Genesis 1 and 2, we know that Adam and Eve are already like God. They are made in his image.

That's the irony. God is the king of this world. But he also made Adam and Eve as royalty and he gave them the world for them to rule over.

As the psalmist says, he put everything under their feet. Now, if we are not certain about that, all we have to do is flip back a page or two to Genesis 2, verse 19 to 20.

There, we discover that God is bringing each living creature for Adam to name them. As God does so, what he's really doing is affirming Adam's role as a king who is like God.

For, just as God named different aspects of the world back in Genesis 1, like when he caught the dry ground land and the gathered waters the seas.

[27 : 25] So now, he invites Adam to be just like him by naming the animals. You see, the serpent is not offering something new.

He is simply offering something humanity already has. He has pulled off the ultimate con job. God. But like a master con man, sin tries to make us forget the ways in which we are already God-like and tells us to pursue the one way we shouldn't be like God, which is to act in the place of God himself.

You see, what does it mean to know good and evil here? It doesn't simply mean knowing in your head what good and evil is. After all, Adam and Eve have already tasted goodness itself in the garden of Eden.

No, to know good and evil here means to decide for oneself what is good and what is evil, as if we are a law unto ourselves.

Sin whispers to us to be like God in the sense of replacing God himself, to become the one who can decide what we do with our lives ultimately without reference to him.

[28 : 50] So that's how sin works. It wants you to lose faith in a God who is good and trustworthy. And it wants you to believe lies, that he is not those things, and therefore we have to take things into our own hands.

Do you see how sin doesn't just invite you, but seeks to persuade you? Sin wants you to develop a false faith. And the moment we reach for that fruit, the moment we are selfish and proud, the moment we fail to be God-centered, is the moment we are exercising false faith.

That's the moment we know we have fallen for the lies. It's that moment when the scam artist successfully gets you to hand over the password, and all is lost.

It's so quick, isn't it? In just one verse, verse 6, the woman sees, takes, eats it, gives some to her husband, who also eats it without resistance.

This is the script that has been in operation for thousands of years ever since Genesis 3. So what's the solution?

[30 : 10] Is it simply now for us to say, well guys, stop believing the lies, hey, got to do better, unlike Adam and Eve. But that can't be, because we can't do better than our forefathers.

Romans 5 tells us that ever since Genesis 3, their spiritual DNA has been deeply imprinted into us. We are hardwired to exchange truth for a lie.

We need help from somewhere, someone else who doesn't bear the same spiritual DNA as the first Adam. And here is the good news.

The God of Genesis 1 and 2, the God who provides and blesses, has never changed. And so he makes sure the story doesn't stop at Genesis 3.

he makes sure to provide a remedy to this corn drop so that blessing might once again flow to us. To do this, he steps into this world.

[31 : 16] For into this world comes someone who bears the very image of God. He's called the second Adam even. The Apostle John even calls him the truth.

God's God's goodness. And in Matthew 4, he is not in the garden, but a wilderness. And so he's got less visual evidence of God's goodness around him.

And as in Eden, the devil appears with a crafty scheme. And notice, once again, it's got to do with food. Jesus has not eaten for 40 days, and so you can bet he's hungry.

And once again, the devil employs a similar script to get him to eat in disobedience to God. As in Eden, the devil quotes God's word to Jesus, subtly twisting its meaning.

As in Eden, he offers an alternative reward, the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus has a firm view of his heavenly father. The devil twists God's word, but he untwists them back.

[32 : 30] And though the devil offers him the kingdom without the cross, Jesus knows he already has the kingdoms, but he cannot bypass the cross.

And that's exactly what he does as he proceeds from the wilderness to yet another garden, the garden of Gethsemane, where because of his obedience to death, he pours out God's blessing yet again to us.

And once again, we have a choice. Do we place our faith in God as we trust in his son Jesus, or do we place it somewhere else?

You see, in the end, everyone is a believer. Everyone has a faith. they are no unbelievers in this world because everyone believes in something or someone.

So the question is never really about whether we believe, but what we believe in and who we believe in. The question is whether we are exercising a true faith or a false faith.

[33 : 43] And sin and Satan are trying their best to get us to be inherently suspicious of God, to believe the worst about him, to see him as out to get us.

They are always lying to us. It's no accident that one of Satan's chief titles is deceiver. For when we buy into those lies about God, we will certainly sin.

Genesis 3 shows us that's how sin works. But God says, look at my goodness, look at my trustworthiness for look at the cross.

Having trouble believing that sin has serious consequences? Look at the cross, where the penalty is borne by no less than the Son of God himself.

Having trouble believing that God really, really loves you and wants to do you good, that he's holding nothing back from you. Look to the cross, where God gave no less than his only begotten Son for you.

[34 : 56] At the cross, all lies about God are exposed. That's where we need to look. But of course, as we said at the very beginning, the zombies are still here.

The victory is won, but the war is not yet over. So, now that we know his script, what else can we do to keep fighting false faith? Well, as we finish, let me briefly just mention two things.

Firstly, don't forget, we need to fight sin, not just at the level of action, but at the level of belief. We must ask every time we're tempted to sin, what lie is sin or Satan feeding me here?

What do I believe about God's character at this point? What do I believe about what I really need? Take bitterness, for example.

Why are we tempted to hold a sinful grudge against somebody? Perhaps because we believe that God is not really just and weren't right to perceive wrong against me.

[36 : 07] Perhaps we believe that holding a grudge will bring me more satisfaction than if I release that matter into God's hands. But here's the thing, remember, sin always over-promises and under-delivers.

It promises you that you'll be satisfied holding onto that grudge. And maybe you will, for a moment. But soon you're unhappy again.

And like Adam and Eve, you will lose more than you gain. You lack joy, contentment, the ability to reconcile.

Because remember, sin is a scam artist. As Kim Chester puts it on the screen, sin always leaves you wanting more.

Of course it does because it is not the real thing. It does not bring you real joy. joy. In that moment, we think that the pleasures of sin are real and the joy of God is insubstantial.

[37 : 12] Sin has substance, we think, while God seems intangible and distant. But the truth is, it is the other way round. Everything we experience that brings us joy is but a shadow, a pale reflection of the source of joy, which is God.

So fight not just at the level of action, but of belief. And if you are walking alongside someone to help them fight sin, help them fight at this level too.

Don't just tell them exercise more self-control. Instead, explore together with them, where am I exercising false faith? What wrong views of God am I believing at this moment?

And of course, this presupposes a good knowledge of the word. So secondly, to fight false faith, deepen your grasp of God's word. You would notice that it's not enough to know just a few verses without understanding.

The serpent is a master at quoting scripture too. Now, you need to understand, to have a proper handle on God's word, to interpret well.

[38 : 28] As Psalm 119 verse 11 says, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. And if we hide God's word in our hearts, we will be led back to the gospel.

For the whole Bible is not a set of moral do's and don'ts, but a story of how God never gives up on the children of Adam and Eve, even when they've messed up big time.

It's a story of a God who wants us to come back to the fellowship of the garden. It's a story about Christ, the truth who puts us on the way to enjoy life to the full.

Is this not the essence of our belief? Is this not the essence our faith? So let's battle false faith by exercising true faith.

So as we close, let me invite the musicians back up on stage. But just before we respond with a closing song, I want us to have a moment of silence, to reflect on what we just heard, for you to pray in your own hearts to God if you need to do business with him.

[39 : 52] And after that, we're all going to say a prayer together, like how we normally do during communion, it will be flashed up on the screen, so that if we are struggling for what words to say to God, that prayer might give you the words that you need.

So let's just take a moment of silence now, for you to approach God on your own. We'll say this prayer together, then we'll stand and sing.■■■.

WeEnloe■■ code and the love with you. We'll have his peace. He li sufficiently at the spiritual peace.

We'll go to God hopefully don't may Bend I Vaticano I don't understand me so Let us pray aloud together the words on the screen.

Holy and merciful God, in your presence, we confess our sinfulness, our shortcomings, and our offense against you.

[41 : 06] You alone know how often we have sinned in believing lies about you, in wandering from your ways, in wasting your gifts, in forgetting your love.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, for all we have done to displease you. Forgive our sins and help us to live in your light and the truth of the gospel. Amen.