

## **Program 50 Teaser**

Israel's King Saul leaves a lesson for the ages. Especially for those of us in any kind of Christian leadership. Of course, the lesson is really for any believer, including husbands and fathers. Don't ever stop learning. Don't let people build you up into a big shot. Big shots got shot big—and those who build them up will be there to tear them down. But another Saul—the servant apostle Paul—knew how to fight and win the spiritual war no believer in Jesus can avoid. What are the traps a real Satan likes to spring on the careless and unwary? What makes for a winner in this war? What make for losers? Let's learn together. "How To Avoid Satan's Traps"—today on More Than Talk.

## **PROGRAM 50 PAGE 1**

### **HOW TO AVOID SATAN'S TRAPS (PART 1)**

#### **PAGE 1 No Excuses Allowed**

What I'm about to share is not easy. It's a subject that causes honest men to tremble because of the danger of sounding either judgmental or above temptation. Yet with the scandals that have exploded in some major Christian ministries, questions come in like the ocean tide—one after another.

What's going on? Why are high-dives into the lowest pits of sin happening to not only those in Christian media, but also in too many pulpits in the land? What are the lessons God is trying to teach His Church? And, while avoiding a condemning attitude toward those who fall, what is the equal danger of making forgiveness too "easy" and restoration to the ministry a speeded-up process with deadly ramifications?

I offer this teaching in the spirit of I Corinthians 2:3, "weakness, fear and much trembling" and with the terrible awareness of 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." But I also offer it with an honest heart, knowing that God's grace is sufficient for every test (II Corinthians 12:9) and that He who has begun a good work in you and me will perform it as we yield to Him one day at a time (Philippians 1 :6).

#### **NO EXCUSES**

Certain facts need to be taught. These journeys into immorality and many other sins must not merely be attributed to a "last days" scenario, as if Christians are suddenly snagged by the devil with no warning or power to resist. Such is not the case. The dirtier the world gets and the more sin abounds, the more powerfully the ever-living God has caused His grace to abound in those who are willing to experience it (Romans 5:20).

Christ's resurrection power leaves us with no excuse in any age, so the Holy Spirit must have many lessons that He is urgently attempting to teach His Church—and especially those who call ourselves Christian leaders. Let me cover this chapter in seven simple but profound and dynamic principles. The truth is that no Christian leader need fall into sin. God has provided a way to avoid every fatal trap of Satan, as we are about to discover.

## **Principle #1—The Shaking Is From God**

Caring Christians rightfully ache when revelations of sin in the lives of Christian leaders are made public. But to blame these revelations on Satan is to be scripturally incorrect. Obviously, the world—especially the media—gloats over Christian scandal. There is no doubt that the cause of Christ and even the name of God is blasphemed when those who name His name and preach His gospel are revealed as first class hypocrites (Romans 2:21-24), but God Himself never changes and is never tarnished.

In fact, it is God who is ordering the shaking. Hebrews 12:27 indicates that He is shaking everything that is loose and that does not adhere to His standards of purity, power and principle.

## **PROGRAM 50 PAGE 2**

### **HOW TO AVOID SATAN'S TRAPS**

#### **PAGE 2 No Superstars Allowed**

That's the good news out of bad. When Christians in high places, greatly used of God, suddenly fall from the heights, many of us rightly tremble with, "But for the grace of God, there go I." We begin to search our hearts more thoroughly (Psalm 139:23,24) to see if spiritual termites have invaded our own infrastructure. We see our own human willingness to perform as inadequate to stand the assaults of today's temptations and we cry out to a sovereign God for supernatural grace to carry us through (Hebrews 12:28; 4:14-16).

We also recognize that an avalanche of sin doesn't just happen in a moment—but accumulates over a period of time with one flake of compromise at a time. The deadly progression of sin mentioned in James 1:13-16 begins with appetites that are allowed to range and then rage out of control before a final, full bite into sin.

#### **No "Superstars"**

Another lesson that the Church is getting is that God will allow no "superstars" in genuine Christianity. There are no superstars among human beings—only a super God. He will share the credit and the glory with no man, declaring "My glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8) and will not tolerate His Church taking on the wrappings, wrinkles and warts of the world's behavior and of its principles of performance.

When sin in the camp rises to certain unacceptable heights, even a long-suffering God, who has promised to bring everything out at the judgment seat of Christ, doesn't wait for eternity but comes as a consuming fire, revealing sin publicly for all to see. Fact is, no man wants a harlot for a bride—and God won't stand for His bride playing the adulteress or allowing the seeming "success" of spiritual leaders to blind us to the fact that we are to "know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7: 16) not by their performance or crowd numbers.

Something else that is good is coming out of the shaking. It's easy for people in smaller and humbler media giants--even to the point of unconsciously subjecting their own pastors to the "little faith" category. But along comes a horrifying scandal and suddenly their pastor's stock goes up. He is seen as the real spiritual

giant, by the grace of God, because of his long-term faithfulness to Christ, his mate, his family and his ministry. Some Christians even begin to spend more hours using their talents in their own church vineyard.

And a mocking world, while laughing on the outside at Christian scandals, often trembles and begins to fear because the same sins they themselves are committing have just been exposed in the Christian leader as something heinous and unacceptable. And since "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7), some of them become wise enough to confess their own hidden sins and meet Jesus Christ, who alone measures up as the "true hero."

**HOW TO AVOID SATAN'S TRAPS**

**PAGE 3 Beware The Numbers Game**

**Principle #2—The Seducing Spirit of Show Biz Success**

Every one wants a hero. That's why Superman is still going strong after fifty years. Sports greats are idolized. Movie stars are canonized. And certain statesmen are lionized. Today, even being a star isn't enough. It's the "superstar" that draws top billing. The number one football game in America is called the Superbowl. And even a stadium is called the Superdome. All of America is caught up in the success syndrome. The parlance of performance. The numbers game. Great crowds. Great dollars. Great talents. The spirit of success drives America.

But the spirit of success is not the Spirit of God. On the contrary, it's often the seducing spirit of Satan fueled by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride or life (I John 2: 15). Therefore, when the spirit of performance and success, minus the foundation of faithfulness and godliness, is embraced by Christianity, it can have deadly consequences. And it *is* being embraced—with catastrophic results.

What I'm about to say may be misconstrued as sour grapes against any form of bigness. Such is not the case, but I want to get a point across. When two ministers meet and compare church activity, where does it often center? "How many people come to your services?" "What's your membership?" There may be nothing wrong with this. Numbers are important if each of the numbers equals a person who is receiving personal care and discipleship training. But numbers can be deceiving. How often does one hear these questions, "How large is your discipleship class?" "How many missionaries have gone out from the church?" "What's your missionary budget?" "How many Christians are involved in your evangelistic program?"

Competitive juices can be beneficial in certain aspects—even in the spiritual world. It's not wrong to compete in greater and greater degrees of servant-hood--seeking how much we can grow in esteeming others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). The same holds true in out-doing each other in sacrificial love (Hebrews 10:24). But the world's desire to perform is not geared toward God but to the gratification of ego. Gain becomes godliness. Numbers and dollars become the

bottom line for proving one has arrived at the top. When that rationale invades Christian leadership, spiritual decay sets in.

The Spirit of God warns against comparing our ministries or gifts to others ("... but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." II Corinthians 10: 12). And if dollars signal success, then the richest skinflints in this world are the most godly, while many missionaries serving sacrificially are the most ungodly. Paul blows that away with I Timothy 6:5 where he equates perverse and corrupt minds with the "gain is godliness" thinkers of I Timothy 6:6—and warns Christians to withdraw from such thinking and such people.

## **PROGRAM 50 PAGE 4**

### **HOW TO AVOID SATAN'S TRAPS**

#### **PAGE 4 The Fine Line**

There is nothing wrong with bigness if it has faithfulness as its foundation. But the line is fine in hearing the still small voice of God (Psalm 46: 10) instead of the seducing spirit of the world. It takes quality time in examining heart and motives in the Word of God and in prayer. When the business of the church takes priority over intimacy with the Lord, the seducing spirit of show biz success holds the high ground. Everyone wants a hero—but in genuine Christianity, God demands that Jesus Christ alone be that hero.

Here's an example of another thing. Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11: 1). A true spiritual leader wants others to follow him—but only because he is following closely to the Lord Jesus. Anytime we in Christian leadership cease "looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1,2), we lose sight of the fact that it's only God's grace that has prevented our fall up to now.

We also lose sight of the diligence we're to have in searching our own hearts to see if there are seeds of compromise growing in our hearts today which will result in trees of sin and death tomorrow. And people who sit in pews with eyes and hearts riveted on Christian leaders in the limelight need to know of these assaults that the forces of hell will make on every godly leader—lest they themselves become unwilling dupes of Satan in helping to set up their leader for a fall. How that can come about is discussed in the next principle that we shall cover.

#### **Principle #3 -- The Seduction Of Pride**

It's easy to place Christian leaders on such a pinnacle that there is only one way to go—down. That's because it's hard to stay small when others make you out to be so big. It's hard to stay insignificant when others tell you that you're great.

We don't start out that way. No one plans to fall into the deadly trap of pride. We even fear that greatest of satanic offense—the inflated ego. Aware that it was pride that caused Lucifer to be thrown out of heaven (Isaiah 14), we even memorize scriptures geared toward humility, "Pride goeth before destruction..." (Proverbs 16: 18). "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10: 12). "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"



(I Peter 5:5, 6). And during the initial struggling in a new ministry, we find little propensity toward pride. After all, it's hard to be proud when one is struggling just to keep his head above water.

But then growth comes. People gather around. Grateful disciples begin expressing admiration for the discipler. And when that glory is not immediately passed on to the Lord, the stages in the fall of a new King Saul begin. That tragic king of Israel started out so small-seven hiding from the king-makers. However, enamored with his own physical magnificence, gifts, and successes, he took the long fall into the pit of pride with that terrible and sad rebuke of Samuel, "When thou wast little in thine own sight ..." (I Samuel 15: 17).

**HOW TO AVOID SATAN'S TRAPS**

**PAGE 5 No Leader Is An Island**

I heard of a great evangelist who was kept from any taint of scandal throughout his ministry. He had a friend constantly reminding him of his faults and shortcomings. What a wise man. And what a great friend he had. His corrections were not done in a sniping way--but in a saving manner that allowed that Christian leader to view his own warts as well as wonderful traits—his weaknesses and sins as well as his strengths. That leads more heavily into our next point.

**Principle #4— The Salvation Of Accountability**

Accountability to God and others is not a snare but a safety net. It keeps a Christian leader from being blown apart by Satan's land mines planted in inconspicuous places. When I was a Marine, we used to probe for practice mines with a bayonet-poking very gently. Once the mines were cleared, two strips of tape were laid forming a path. We were learning that as long as the Marines charging from behind stayed within that path, they would be safe. To wander out of that strip of accountability was to endanger one's limbs and life.

God's pathway is no different. We cry out "Lord lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Psalm 27:11) and we're promised that if we'll trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and refuse to lean on our own understanding, He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5,6). But that does not happen with a Christian leader remaining an island to himself—accountable only to God.

When the Lord said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2: 18), I'm convinced He was referring to more than the marriage relationship—or even fellowship with another person or people. I believe He was also referring to each of us being exhorted and corrected by others in the body of Christ—iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27: 17). Moses listened to Jethro and avoided being buried under a mountain of stress. Saul failed to listen to Samuel and paid a terrible price. David accepted Nathan's rebuke and was restored to being a man after God's own heart. Peter's hypocrisy in leaving the Gentiles when Jews came around was openly confronted by Paul—and Peter became a better man for it.

Christian leaders, used in special ways by the Holy Spirit, are special targets of Satan. The reason for this is easy to see—destroy a Christian leader and you may

destroy the faith of many a person looking to him as an example. But how can we keep from being eaten up by the termites of compromise and sin or from falling under the wiles of the devil? That's covered in our next program.