



Why God Allows Satanic Attacks: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 Pastor JD Farag

Once you find your way there, if you're able, I'll ask you to stand. You can follow along as I read, if not, where you're seated is fine. I should have done this earlier, but that's all right. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church there in Thessalonica. By the Holy Spirit says, verse 13, "And we also thank God continually."

"We also thank God continually [and we're going to be told why] Because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word. But as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus.

You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed [verse 15] the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out." A reference to Paul being driven out, ran out of Thessalonica when he was there, starting this church. Some believe only 3 weeks before they ran him out of town.

"They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way, they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last." Wow. Verse 17, "But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time, [and we're told parenthetically] in person, not in thought.

Out of our intense longing, we made every effort to see you for we wanted to come to you. Certainly, I Paul, did again and again, but [interesting] Satan blocked our way. [What] For what is our hope, [verse 19] or joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

Let's pray, if you would join with me. Lord, thank you. Thank you so much. Lord, we're here today to worship you, to learn of you, to draw near to you, and to commune with you. Lord, will you bless our time together we pray, in Jesus name. Amen and Amen. You can be seated, thank you.

I want to talk with you today about a really tough topic concerning spiritual warfare, specifically, satanic attack. And namely that of why it is that oftentimes God will allow the devil and his demons to attack us as His people in this fallen world. We're always going to, this side



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of heaven, be dealing with what I'll call the "Big 3", as a car guy:
The world; The flesh; And the devil.

There are those times when God allows the devil to attack us and that's what I want to talk about today. Now, it's important to understand that the enemy cannot so much as touch a hair on our head unless he has permission from God to do it. It seems that God has given him permission to touch a lot of hairs that once used to be upon my head, which is what I'm trying to overcompensate. Enough of my problems.

But the enemy can do absolutely "no thing" to us unless he first gets permission from God to do it. Here's the thing: God will never give the devil permission to do anything to us unless, in the end, it's for our good and His glory. If it's not for our good? No way! Ain't going to happen. I know that's not proper English. Don't email me.

If it's for His glory and our good, He will give the enemy permission to attack. To block, if you will, as He did here with the Apostle Paul. One need look no further to the accounts in Scripture, like with Job in the Old Testament. For those of you who were here with us on Thursday nights, we were going through the Bible.

We went through the book of Job. What a, I want to use the word "intense". It was such an intense study through that Book of Job. But right out of the chute, at the beginning of the book, we're told that Satan was roaming around the earth and he apparently still has access to heaven. By the way, which is why there's going to be a new heaven for all eternity.

But as he's there, God says to him, "I noticed you've kind of been roaming about throughout the earth. Did you happen to notice my servant, Job? Well, as a matter of fact, I have. That's why I'm here, by the way. I want to talk to you about him. I want to ask you for permission. Because here's the thing, God. The only reason Job is so righteous, the only reason Job serves you is because you just bless him. You prosper him.

You want to make a bet? Not that God bets. But I'll bet you Satan would say that if you raise your hand, or let me mess with him, and come against him and take from him? He'll curse you to your face. God says, you're on, but you can only do this." Of course, Satan goes right up to that line that God gave him permission to go. The whole book is about Satan attacking Job in unthinkable ways.



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Then there's Peter. Remember that account in the gospel where Jesus and Peter are having this conversation? And Jesus says to Peter, "Peter, Satan has asked for permission for you to sift you as wheat." It's not there in the narrative or in the text, but I can just imagine what Peter's thinking to himself, "You didn't give him permission, did you, Jesus? Yeah, I did. You did! Why? Because in the end, it's going to be for your good, and it's going to be for my glory. I did give him permission to sift you as wheat." And boy did he. Again, like with job, Satan went right up to the line of that which he was given permission to do.

In our text today, we see God allowing Satan not to sift Paul, not to take from Paul, but to block Paul. Why? Because of what it accomplished. God had a greater good. Though not exhaustive, I believe our text today provides us with 3 reasons as to why it is and when it is that God will give Satan permission to block us, attack us, oppress us, mess with us.

The 1st one is to turn us back to the Word of God and prayer. In verses 13 through 16, the Apostle Paul is connecting the dots, as it were. As it relates to the suffering and persecution there, with the Thessalonian Christians. It was really coming primarily from the Jews who were trying to make trouble.

The very Jews that had driven Paul out of Thessalonica. Paul is acknowledging to them, "Yes, I know that they have persecuted you. They have afflicted you, but do you know what that's caused you to do? It's caused you to embrace the Word of God for what it is: God's Word!

Would you agree with me that when adversity strikes, Satan attacks, Satan blocks? That it has this much needed effect of drawing us back to the Lord, to his Word, and to prayer? That's what God accomplishes. Here's this fictitious account of Satan asking permission for you. He's stalking you, as we're told in the Scriptures, "Like a lion waiting for that optimum time to attack and strike." But he can't until he gets permission.

So, he goes and asks God, "Hey, can I have permission to attack JD?" Wait, why is it so silent all of a sudden? And here's God, looking at me saying, "Yeah, go ahead. You can do this because I know what he will do when you do that. He will fall to his knees on his face before me. You want to bet? Watch him. Oh, he'll get into the Word. He'll pray. He will seek me. He'll draw near to Me and Me to him. Go ahead. I give you permission."



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See, God knows that sometimes it takes both persecution and affliction to get our attention. I wish it were not so. When things were going good, I'm not in the Word as much. I'm not in prayer as much. I mean, things are going great. Thank you, Lord. But boy, let adversity strike. You've got my attention, Lord. Good. That's why I let Satan do that, to get your attention, to draw you back to me.

I'm going to make a statement. I've mentioned this before. I've stated this before and I think it bears repeating. It's that persecution and affliction does not hinder the church. The opposite is true. It's the absence of persecution and affliction that will hinder the church. Do you want to grow the church? Persecute the church, the church will grow. We can ask our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world that are under severe persecution.

This is true for God's church collectively and so is this true for God's people individually. I think of David in Psalm 119, verse 67, listen to what he says. He says, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word." Lord, you had to bring affliction. You had to bring persecution. You had to bring adversity; You had to bring spiritual warfare.

You got my attention now! I was kind of going off, doing my own thing. Getting busy and caught up with the cares and the affairs of this world. Then you gave the enemy permission to afflict me, to attack me and it brought me back to you and back to your Word.

I want to be careful when I say this. But I've been in the ministry as a pastor for... I got to think about this now for a second over 20 years. Wow. Give me a moment on this. Twenty years I've been a pastor and over the years, I've noticed. I've taken note of how it is that... Please, I don't want you to be uncomfortable when I say this.

But I will look at you, sitting there, and I can tell when God's got your attention. Maybe I should use this example from when I was a pastor on the mainland. Let's do that. That's better; That's safer. So, I'm on the mainland and someone would be sitting there in church, as they always do every week.

They're kind of like this and I can't I don't mean this about anybody here. Some of you have come up to me afterwards and apologize, "Pastor, I'm so sorry if you saw me nodding off, I didn't really get a good night's sleep last night. It wasn't you. It's just I'm really tired. I had a really rough week.



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I say, "Hey, listen, no worries. It's not a problem if you fall asleep, that's fine. I have that effect on some people, except when I scream, then I wake them up. But that's not a problem. The problem would be is, if I fell asleep, while I was preaching, that's a problem. It's just kind of like this, and I want to be humorous in a sanctified way. It's kind of one of these, kind of like the eyes roll back, then the head jerks up, he comes out of it, and then it's back to that [nodding off].

Again, I speak of no one here today. You guys are so attentive. So, then maybe that week something happens and the Lord lets it happen. And that following Sunday, they're not doing this [nodding off]; They're like this [wide-open attention] Turn to . . . , I'm already there! Let's pray... Yes! Or in the worship, [hands raised high].

Can we talk about the worship, just briefly? Of course, we can. I mean, the week prior it was "I surrender all, [big yawn], right? The following week, "I surrender all." [loudly] Verse 71, few verses later, Psalm 119, "It was good for me to be afflicted." It was? Yeah, it was a good thing. It was a God thing. It was good for me and it was to the glory of God.

If it's good for me and it brings glory to God, God's going do it. It was good for me to be afflicted. Why? So that I might learn your decrees. I got to learn a lesson. I'm getting to the place; I've been walking with the Lord for 37 years plus now. And I am finally, better late than never, I guess. I'm finally getting to the place where when Satan attacks, adversity strikes, affliction happens.

My first response, not my last resort, is okay, "Lord, what do you want to show me? What do you want to teach me? What do you want me to see? What do you want me to learn? Obviously, you've allowed this to happen because you will never allow anything to happen to me, not one hair fall from my head. You will never allow anything. So obviously this has happened.

Why? "Oh, I'm glad you asked," is God's response. "Here's why." Wow. I will learn things about the Lord that I could never otherwise learn. Absent the affliction, and a spiritual warfare, and the adversity. When things are going good, I don't learn during times of prosperity. It's during times of adversity, that's when I learn.

See, and I hate to say it this way, but you know what I mean when I say it. God's got a problem. God doesn't have problems. But actually, we're



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the problem and the problem is that we are prone to wander. I mean, it doesn't take much. I mean, it's a magnetic pull as it were when it comes to the world, the flesh, the things of this world. I often times wonder if the reason why God called me into the ministry as a pastor and teacher is so that I would be forced to stay in his Word. Because he knows what I'm prone to do.

Even this last month, not being in the pulpit, interesting. My time with the Lord took on a whole new meaning. My time in the Word; My time in prayer, so rich. I'm like, wow, Lord, I don't ever want this to end. To which He said, "Well, it has to end because you have to be back in the pulpit. Oh, Lord, I've been just enjoying this time with you. You've shown me so many things.

He knows that we are prone to wander. The story is told about that timeless and classic hymn of old "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing". It's about wandering and going astray. One writer described it this way. It is an unfortunate turn of events when a young boy is forced to grow up without a loving father. Thus, was Robert Robinson's fate. His dad passed away when he was only eight years of age. To make Robert's circumstances much more difficult, his maternal grandfather, Robert Wilkin, a wealthy man who had never reconciled himself to his daughter's lowly marriage, disinherited his grandson and provided an inheritance for him of only 10 shillings and sixpence.

Even in his youth, he endured the hardship of having to be the breadwinner for his widowed mother and himself. As he grew older, he came under the influence of the famed evangelist, George Whitfield. On December 10th, 1755 Robinson could not push from his mind a particular phrase used by Mr. Whitfield in one of his sermons, "Oh, my hearers the wrath to come, the wrath to come."

Interesting, Paul talks about the wrath that will come upon the Jews who did this. He was wondrously converted and became a minister of the Gospel. First in a Baptist church, then in a Methodist church, and later in other denominations. In one location, his congregation grew to 1,000 in attendance. Unfortunately, and for some unexplained reason, he became altogether unstable and unhappy. His Christian beliefs and training seemed of little importance to him.

On one occasion years later, he found himself the fellow passenger of a young lady on a stage coach. It is reported that she began to sing to break the monotony of the trip. And what did she sing? Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing:



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Tune my heart to sing thy grace; Streams of mercy never ceasing. Call for songs of loudest praise; Teach me some melodious sonnet; Sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it; Mount of thy redeeming love. Oh, to grace, how great a debtor; Daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter; Buying my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander Lord, I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, Lord. Take and seal it; Seal it for thy courts above.

As she finished singing, the young woman asked Roberts, "What he thought about that song?". His startling reply, "Madam, I am the unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago and I would give 1,000 worlds if I had them. If I could feel now, as I felt then."

You might be here today and it's been pretty rough. It seems that God's given Satan permission to sift you. And you're sitting here in this church, "sifted as wheat". Don't despise it; Don't dismiss it. Embrace it. It's God's way of bringing you back to Him.

Can I say it this way? He misses you. He loves you. He wants you back. He misses that time that you would, once upon a time, have with him. That intimacy; He had to use the devil. By the way, Important, don't miss this. Thank you, Lord, for reminding me to say this.

The devil is God's devil. What? Yeah, the devil is God's devil. He's not God's opposite. He's not all powerful. He's not all present. He's all not all-knowing Only God is. He's not God's opposite. I think we do err greatly when we imagine that Satan is equal to God. He's not! He is a defeated foe!

Sometimes we would do well to tell him that, out loud. I do! I know they have clinical terms for that, but I do. When he tries to put thoughts in my mind, I say, Stop! Get out of here! You're a liar. I don't believe you. You're a liar. Every time you say something, or put something in my mind, you're lying because you're the father of lies. I'm not going to believe your lie.

I'm going to believe God's truth. That's not true. It's not consistent with what God's word of truth says. Get out of here! Go bother somebody else. I resist him and he flees. He has to. When he attacked Jesus, what did Jesus do? He quoted Deuteronomy, by the way, the Word of God.



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Sometimes God has to allow the enemy to attack because it brings us back to Him, to His Word.

Here's the 2nd reason, in verses 17 and 18, and this is a "biggie". It's to protect and redirect our paths. Let me explain this one. Verse 18 to me is one of the most stunning verses in all of Scripture. The reason is, is that Satan was actually allowed to block the Apostle Paul from going back to Thessalonica, which he longed to do?

He says that I really wanted to, I longed to, again and again, continually. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I want to go back to the Thessalonians and see how they're doing. But Satan blocked me and God allowed him to block me.

Why? Why would God allow Satan to do that? That doesn't make any sense. You would think that God would certainly open up that door for Paul to go back and see how this church is doing? God allowed Satan to block him because God was actually protecting Paul and redirecting Paul. Sometimes God will allow the enemy to attack us in order to protect us from a greater trial.

I know that I need to expound on that. Remember when the disciples were told by the Lord to get into the boat onto the Sea of Galilee and he would meet them on the other side? There seems to be in the gospel account of that there was some urgency on the part of the Lord. You don't really see that in the Scriptures.

I never really see the Lord in a hurry. But apparently at this particular time, he's kind of in a hurry to get the disciples into the boat. Why? He wants to get them into the boat, knowing that they're going to enter into a perilous life and death storm. In other words, He knowingly sends them into a storm.

Why would he do that? He's protecting them from a potentially greater storm had they stayed. What do you mean? Oh, they just got done feeding the multitudes. Jesus is like, "I got to get them out of here because they want to stay. I mean, they're heroes right now, and it's going to their head. Peter wants to start the 1st church of the "Feeding of the Multitudes" on this site here. And he's going to have an instant mega church. I mean, I got to get them out of here to protect them from pride.

That's the greater trial. So, he sends them, redirects them into that storm in order to protect them from what could have been a more



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perilous storm. The peril of pride which will ultimately lead to the fall. God will never put us in a situation where the environment is conducive to our fall. He can't. Conversely, he will always put us in a situation that is conducive to our obedience to him. In other words, you can be right smack in the middle of a trial, a perilous storm.

Maybe you're here today and you're in one of those storms. And it's shaking you. You're like Lord, why are you allowing this? It's like the Lord is saying, "If only you knew what I was protecting you from. This storm is to protect you from a greater storm.

I wonder, what if Paul would have been allowed to go back to Thessalonica? I wonder what would have happened? Do you think those Jews that run him out of town the last time are going to be there still? Oh, you better believe that they are going to be there.

Here's the other thing I have to ask myself, "Let's say that God didn't allow Satan to block his way from going back to Thessalonica. Would we have 2 letters written to the Thessalonians? I don't think so. In other words, God brought about the greater good by having 2 letters. Paul wrote the letter in lieu of his going back there. That's why he wrote this letter and had it sent to them. I wanted to come: That's why I'm writing.

In other words, had he gone, we wouldn't have 1 Thessalonians. Let's just close a prayer and go home. No, we have the prophecy update first, and then we'll go home. No, then we have Communion, and then we will go home. We wouldn't have first Thessalonians. We wouldn't have second Thessalonians.

Oh, by the way, 1 Thessalonians was the 1st epistle the Apostle Paul ever wrote. The 1st epistle that he was inspired, by the Holy Spirit, that we have in the canon of Scripture, is 1 Thessalonians. Had God not allowed Satan to block his way, we wouldn't have this. I can't even imagine my Bible without 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Do you want to know why? You know why. Because, as we're going to see, it's all about the rapture of the church and the return of the Lord, which is exactly what he's going to talk about now.

In so doing, give us this 3rd reason. It's the best for last, if you ask me, why does God allow Satan to attack us as His people? Because it has this effect of creating a longing for the Lord's return. Verses 19 and 20 are interesting. It's like Paul saying, "You guys, Satan may



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have blocked me from coming to you, but it just makes me long even more for the Lord's coming for us.

Isn't it true? Let's be honest. You're in church; You have to be on us, right? If we're honest with ourselves? We would have to admit that when things aren't going good down here? That's when we want the Lord to come and when things are going really good down here? Not so much.

Come on, let's be honest, right? Adversity strikes, you are in this trial. You're like, "Lord, come quickly." Things are going good? Nothing wrong with that. Enjoy! Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, "During times of prosperity, enjoy." Just praise the Lord. You better enjoy it because the trial is coming. And then he says, "But when adversity..." I wish it said, "If by chance it should happen that adversity should strike..." No, it says, "When adversity strikes."

When God allows Satan to torment you, like He did Paul? With whatever that thorn in the flesh might be in your life? And you pray, "God, why are you allowing Satan to torment me with this thorn in my flash? Remove it! Get me out of this! And God says, "I can't, I would. But what you don't realize is that if I did, it would be to your own peril.

Because, see, by me allowing this to continue? It's creating in you this total, complete, reliance, and dependence upon me and me alone. If I were to remove it?" Keep in mind, 14 years prior, Paul had been caught up to heaven. Hey, if God takes me and lets me see what awaits in glory? You don't think that's going to go to my head? I'm telling you right now I'm writing books. I'm speaking all over the world about what I saw.

Not Paul. Why? Because God gave him this thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. Paul, if I remove this thorn, whatever it was... I believe God kept that generic for a reason. So that we would fill in the blanks with whatever that thorn is in our lives. That we've asked God to remove. Why do you let Satan continue to buffet me, to torment me like this? To attack me like this?

Here's why. It is keeping you dependent upon me and waiting for me as you look to me. If I didn't give Satan permission, where would you be? What would your life be like? Where would you go?

I find it most interesting that Paul would say to them and we will close with this. He would say to them, and of them, that they are his



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hope. They are his joy. They are his crown and rejoicing when the Lord comes. That's all that is going to matter.

In the end, this is the Lord's end game, as it were. Everything ultimately points to His return in the end. And when we're going through difficulty, affliction, suffering, and persecution, it makes us long more for the Lord's return. That's why.

So, we're wandering, we're going astray and God says, "I got to get their attention. Satan, go ahead but only up to this point. Boom! Okay! I have their attention. Now I have to get them on the right path, and I have to keep them on that right path. I have to direct their path. I have to protect their path, now that I have their attention, I want them to also focus their attention on Me and my return.

Isaiah says it like this and we'll close. This will be the final closing. "Happy is he whose mind is stayed Him." Let's pray. Father, Lord, heavy on my heart is anyone that might be in this service today that has really been afflicted, is really struggling, going through such difficulty. The enemy has really been attacking them.

Lord, I pray that today this will be an encouragement to them. That you have a purpose, a plan, in allowing it. It's for their good and your glory, in Jesus name. Amen. Amen