

Jesus calls the devil the father of lies. This means that he isn't a lazy liar. No, he's the master liar who deceives the whole world. He doesn't tell unbelievable lies, ones that you can easily laugh off and forget about. No, he cuts deep with his lies. He takes what is true, and he twists it. He gives sweet-smelling poison. That's why Jesus also calls him a murderer. He leads people into horrible acts of bloodshed, and it's all by getting them to believe a lie. The lie that children are not a blessing from God has led to the slaughter of millions of babies in our country. The godless ideology of communism led to millions of murders over the last hundred years. The false doctrine that our bodies are just biological accidents resulting from a random process of evolution has led to all sorts of horrible acts of violence, including the mutilation of children. But as much as the devil wants to murder the body, his main target is the soul. He specifically wants to destroy your soul. He therefore targets three things God has given you. He attacks your faith. He attacks your hope. And he attacks your love. Let us discuss how he does each of these.

The devil attacks your faith in Christ. Faith is confident trust, which clings to God's promise in Christ. Through faith you receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. You receive Christ himself who made full satisfaction for your sins. If the devil destroys this, then he has destroyed everything. If you don't have the confidence that God forgives you of your sins and declares you righteous in his sight, then you have no hope for eternal life. You can't be confident of God's love. Any hope you have is just wishful thinking, and any love you have is only rooted in love for yourself and your own comfort. If you lose your faith, then you might seek refuge in something that seems hopeful. You might embrace a lifestyle that seems loving. But it's all a deceitful show, and it will ultimately blow away in dust.

How does the devil attack your faith? He does so by attacking the object of your faith. Where does your faith come from? It comes from the Word of God. What is your faith in? It's in Christ's righteous obedience in your place, his atoning death, his glorious resurrection, and his advocacy for you at the Father's right hand. The object of your faith is the gospel promise. It's what you believe. It's what you confess. But the devil wants you to believe other things that are contrary to this one saving truth. So he lies.

But remember. He's no slouch of a liar. He's shrewd and winsome. He doesn't directly attack what you believe right off the bat. Instead, he convinces you that God's Word isn't very clear in what it teaches. As he said to the woman in the garden, "Did God really say?" Does the Bible really say that God literally created the universe in six days? Does God really forbid the kinds of sexual perversions promoted in our day? Does God really say that there is a difference between men and women? Does the Bible really teach that baptism saves or that the bread and wine in the Sacrament are Christ's true body and blood? Did Jesus really die for the sins of the whole world? Does God really desire all people to be saved?

After all, look at what so many other churches teach and do. Several of these churches claim to believe in the truthfulness of the Bible. It's not just the apostate ELCA and other liberal churches who ordain women or have them preach and lead the service. Even so-called Bible believing churches do these things. Many Bible believing churches refuse to baptize babies. Others use grape juice and crackers for the Lord's

Supper. A few deny the existence of hell. Some say that faith comes about partly because of our own free choice. Others say that Jesus didn't die for all people. Some even say that Jesus isn't true God in the flesh. If people who claim that the Bible is true are saying such things, then the Bible must not be very clear about these teachings. This is the lie the devil tells. His aim is to confuse you and make you doubt until you have completely lost your faith.

The devil portrays God's Word as unclear and confusing precisely because God's Word is clear and certain. What God teaches about all these things is crystal clear, and they all bear witness to the most central teaching of Scripture. As surely as Jesus' tomb is empty, God has indeed taken away your sins. His Holy Spirit has given you faith through his Word. By the washing of your baptism, he has joined you to Christ's saving death and resurrection. Christ does feed you with his body and blood. God does desire everyone's salvation. Hell is a real place prepared for the devil and his angels, and Christ truly did save us all from this fiery condemnation.

When we think the Bible isn't clear about these things, then we get discouraged from reading the Bible. We then become even more ignorant. But if you read the Bible, listen to the pure words of God, discuss it with your friends and family, seek understanding from it, and feed on it here in the gathering of the saints, then this will strengthen your faith. The words of God might seem terrifying and difficult at times. But they always bring clarity and understanding. They always lead you to Christ, the object of your faith.

This is therefore how your faith defeats the devil's lies and attacks. You overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of truth. A little child who is taught to confess Christ, who hears his father and mother read God's Word with him at home, who learns to say the Creed, pray the Lord's Prayer, and sing hymns that teach this precious faith – this little child is well armed against the devil's attacks. He who receives Christ in this way is well nurtured in his faith. It doesn't mean that you won't still feel the doubts of your flesh. The devil won't leave you alone. But your faith will rest in the words of eternal life. And no matter how weak your faith is in itself, it cannot be moved when it clings to what Christ our Savior has done and said.

Next, the devil attacks your hope. Your hope is what you wait for. You presently have forgiveness of sins, righteousness, eternal life, and salvation. You have it by faith in Christ and in his Word. But you also wait for it. You pursue it. You press on in this life, striving to enter through that narrow gate, confident that it will be opened for you. You pray to God with the confidence that he will answer your prayers. You do the work God has given you to do in this life, bear the pains and sorrows he causes you to bear, confident that your faithful Lord will see you through to the very end. He will work all things out for your salvation. He has prepared your heavenly inheritance, sealed it with the blood of Christ, and keeps it at his right hand where Christ is seated. This is a sure hope. And the devil wants to destroy it.

So how does the devil attack your hope? He lies, of course. But remember, he isn't a slacker. He's a very experienced liar. He won't blatantly attack your hope for heaven. Instead, he will give you other competing hopes, which God never promised. He says that if you have a strong enough hope, then you can expect your life to go smoothly.

After all, doesn't God say that he will send his angels to attend you lest you strike your foot against a stone? Doesn't the Bible say that God will give you the desires of your heart? Yes, but Scripture also says that God makes us pass through trials in this life. Jesus says that you must deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow him. St. Paul says that we must go through many tribulations before we enter God's kingdom.

Many people are deceived into hoping for a life of ease. And then they imagine that heaven will consist of whatever they enjoyed doing on earth. They hope in earthly success and earthly leisure. But then what happens when they experience the burning trials of this life? Their hope immediately disappears. They despair. They despair of the work God gave them. A man loses his job and reflects on how much he has failed his family and fallen short in his duties as a father and husband. A woman is overwhelmed by her children or burdened by her husband, and she begins to think that her work as a wife and a mother is itself a burden. Maybe you lose an investment, you get betrayed by a friend, or you see how the world is driven by so much greed and selfish ambition. It's enough to make you despair and lose all hope in God. Some even take their own lives. And the devil's murder spree continues.

But our hope in Christ overcomes the devil's lies and false promises. Our hope endures, because we know that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. We can boast in the hope of the glory to come. This is why we can boast even in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. We do not love our lives to the death. Instead, we look to the life of the world to come, considering our present trials to be tiny in comparison to the coming glory of Christ. This is a sure hope.

St. Paul says that our labors are not in vain. Why? Because Christ is risen from the dead! So who can accuse us? The devil? With what? Even when the devil's accusations have a grain of truth in them – and they often do – they are still lies. Are you worthy of raising the children God has given you, caring for the spouse God has given you, teaching the students God has given you, working the job God has given you, caring for the workers God has given you? Are you worthy of any of these things? Of course not! You're sinful and deeply flawed in your nature. You fall short. Your plans often fail. You don't deserve to have any of these things before God. You especially aren't worthy to have the Word of God on your lips. And yet, God has still given these things to you. God has still given you your work to do and his Word to confess. He gives it all to you because he is merciful. He knows that you often stumble and fall. You don't need the devil or your sinful flesh to tell you that. So don't listen to the thoughts of despair. Like a child who has his whole life ahead of him, you are God's child who has eternal life to look forward to. So don't give up! When you know that you aren't worthy of the work God has given you, but you do it anyway with the confidence that God will work it all out in the end, then this causes the devil to run away. Resist him, and he will flee.

Finally, the devil attacks our love. His lies against love are too many to count. But he starts by turning love into something that comes from us. Love quickly becomes meaningless, since it is whatever the world and our flesh say it is. Love is love, says the master deceiver. With this lie, he gets people to call good evil and evil good.

The devil replaces the love of God and your neighbor with the love of earthly things. This is why people celebrate and affirm sin. It's because they don't want conflict. Yet, in their attempt not to offend the sensibilities of the world, they are in fact causing great offense to the weak and impressionable. For this reason, it would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone wrapped around their necks. The love of earthly things leads to a love that grows cold. The devil is then able to get us to suspect evil of one another, put the worst construction on a brother's words and deeds, and neglect to pray for one another. The devil wants to turn us into murderers by sowing in our hearts resentment and hatred for our fellow Christians.

But Christian love overcomes the devil's lies. We love because God first loved us. This is love, not that we have loved him but that he has loved us and gave his Son to make atonement for our sins. He laid his life down for us, and he teaches us to lay our lives down for one another. He forgives us, and he teaches us to forgive one another. When Christians are bearing with one another in love, forgiving one another, and supporting one another, then the devil can't bear it.

The devil has been cast out of heaven. This means that no matter how much he tries to accuse your conscience, he can't accuse you before the throne of God. God has refused to hear his lies, even if they sometimes ring true. Instead, God listens only to his Son who atoned for you. He therefore listens to you who trust in his Son. In the meantime, the angels behold his face, and God commands them to guard us in all our ways. All things must work out to keep our faith resting in his Word, our hope grounded in his promise, and our love binding us together. In Jesus' name: Amen.