



All the Time in the World

⁶Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. ⁷The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

⁸The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

⁹Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."

¹²Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:6–12)

Perhaps one of the greatest distortions of biblical truth, especially as promoted by secular literature and the entertainment industry, is that Satan is on an equal footing with God. Lucifer is often portrayed as having the same powers, abilities and qualities as God as some kind of perceived evil counterbalance to good. But here it is clearly revealed he is not just lacking that kind of equality, but is actually a member found among the lower ranks of other such created beings. In fact, he is not even omnipresent, handicapped by having to roam and walk about the earth, and definitely not omniscient, having no clue what the Lord *or* Job is about to do. This is going to be as much a test for Satan, if not more, than for Job. And so we have been given a great insight into the nature of trials and testing in the course of this life, and what it means to trust in God when the worst of the worst befalls us, and who is the actual source of such events. But suppose Satan issued a request for the same kind of trial but with **opposite** physical attributes. In other words, what if he challenged, "Put forth Your hand and bless him to an **abundance** of riches—give him **everything** he wants, and he will surely curse You to Your face"? What if the nature of the trial was to trust in God to the same

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degree we normally would under the most dire of circumstances when instead we are enriched with far more than we'll ever need?

I believe the first person I ever heard propose this idea was the late Pastor David Wilkerson, and in the intervening years since I have heard it come up a number of times from different individuals as well. It is something specifically articulated in Scripture which stems from the fact that in the Last Days, the Church is mostly characterized by the church of Laodicea. (Rev. 3:14-22) They are a wealthy church who believe they are spiritually well-off because they *"have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"*, but ironically they are actually *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"*. (Rev. 3:17) Because they are blind and do not know they are blind, they are advised to acquire from Christ *"salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see"*, (Rev. 3:18) an ironic parallel since at that time Laodicea was a world famous provider of such a cure for literal eye problems. It's a church which finds Jesus on the outside, knocking to be allowed back in. (Rev. 3:20) This most certainly strikes a familiar chord when it comes to assessing the state of the Western Church at present.

But in our case, in comparison not just to the literal Laodicea of the Apostle John's time, but in relation to every historical generation of Christian preceding us since, we are wealthier than **all** of them put together, and this isn't limited to simply our financial state. That which we have been given through technology, extreme advances in healthcare, and relinquished of the absolute necessity to farm, hunt or gather our daily food, we have been provided with an unprecedented blessing unlike **any** seen before in the way of personal time and opportunity. We are the generation who does not have to make sacrifices just to go to a church meeting or to study the Scriptures; we not only own multiple copies of all the Scriptures, but any books and resources we choose; through our smartphones and computers we have nearly unlimited instant access to them as well as fellow believers regardless of where they are located geographically. **No one** has had the time, resources, tools and opportunities currently imparted to **us**. So why is it that when we have been given all the time in the world, we seem to be spending all of our time **IN** the world? Past generations are shaking their heads at what we've been given and yet squandered.

I am revisiting this topic because it came to my attention through a friend's Facebook page that a fairly well-known author, speaker and brother in the Lord published a warning about the possible Antichrist nature of Christians being ensnared, and thus obsessed,

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with Facebook. (No, the irony that a link to a teaching on the Antichrist nature of Facebook being itself posted on Facebook was not lost on me.) This is not intended as a rebuttal of that assertion, but rather to offer that we need to step back and look at a much larger picture, to metaphorically survey the whole horizon rather than attach ourselves to the one little ant hill immediately in front of us. Christians have been spending their resources of money, time and energy for quite some time now on a near uncountable number of things **both** hosted and completely detached from the Internet.

For those of us who go back to the days before public access to the Internet, that time when it was a more exclusive system called the “Arpanet”, something embodying the essence of Facebook has repeatedly cycled through many similar iterations since the very beginning. It was originally called “USENET News Groups” where topics were started and threads of responses added, followed by a phenomenon for several years known as “BBS’s”—personally hosted electronic bulletin boards which we connected to employing our painfully slow modems over our private phone line. And then the advent of the easily accessible Internet gave us GeoCities, AOL, My Space and all manner of related mimicries to the present, and we’ll probably all soon inevitably move on from Facebook and Instagram to the “next big thing” as well. Not to forget the hundreds of millions of blogs, websites and online forums which have all combined to provide one potential obsession after another for more than thirty years now. If Facebook is an Antichrist device, it most certainly isn’t the first, nor will it be the last, and it can’t possibly be the only one.

But one does not have to look any further than the studies which repeatedly show a daily commitment by the average American of somewhere between 6-8 hours a day dedicated to television, gaming devices, and streaming content from the Internet. We have hundreds of cable channels now, thousands of games, and probably every movie, television show and musical performance ever recorded available for instant consumption. The local library I grew up with, still housed in a magnificent structure officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places as well as a designated California State Landmark, is shadow of its former self and purpose. The tables where visitors at one time studied books, references and periodicals is filled with Internet connected computers often used by the indigent and poor who can’t afford one. The whole of Western society from top to bottom is “connected”.

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However, it would be just as short-sighted to only provide a discussion of the changes brought about by technology. After all, the Internet has really only been available since 1993, and realistically did not become either affordable or popular until 1998 when a thing called “email” captured our collective attention. For those of us old codgers who grew up in church, have been Christians most of our lives, and are old enough to remember when Abe Lincoln was re-elected, the issue took root long before the XBOX, YouTube, or even the very first modem-connected Personal PC, and from my Metamucil perspective, at least since the late 70s.

I realize that if you have been a Christian for less than thirty years, and definitely if less than twenty, it is most likely that we do not share the common experience of what “church” once looked like to us “get off my lawn” old codgers. You might have a vague idea when some fleeting images come up in very old black-and-white films, but at one time it was unthinkable not to go to some kind of church service or related activity at least four times a week—Sunday morning service, Sunday evening service, Wednesday night prayer meeting, and various Saturday activities to support missions, evangelize, or perform community work. Additionally, it would not be at all unusual to attend a women’s, men’s or teen’s prayer breakfast, a small group study or prayer meeting, choir rehearsal, and any number of other such things as being on a Bible Quiz team or going on short-term missions. In between time, a lot of personal time was devoted to Scripture. Church took priority in way that is rarely witnessed in the present spiritual climate.

Yes, there were only seven channels broadcasting on smallish tube-powered black-and-white television sets, Ricky and Lucy were seen on television sleeping in separate beds, and the whole town completely closed down every Sunday, even the fast-food joints, because people had a sizable commitment to their church life. Neither were there youth sports leagues operating to compete with Church on that day. And any secular extra-curricular activities, while not uniformly prohibited, always had to take a back seat to those of church.

Lest we fall into the trap that things were always better in “the good ol’ days”, anything and everything intended for good can and will be misused by fallen, sinful man. This kind of commitment can easily become an attachment promoting a denomination or congregation to the exclusion of the whole Body of Christ or one’s personal Christianity, so as with all things, caveat emptor. But it is quite a stark contrast to the present when

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Sunday evening services are the exception rather than the rule, congregants' participation in services has been replaced by so-called "worship teams", and church is more of something to be checked off on a to-do list rather than embraced as a lifestyle. The pendulum can swing to **both** extremes.

In my opinion, or at least when it first plainly came to my attention, it was in the late 70s when a new movement was capturing the imagination of pastors and seminaries which we now call "The Church Growth Movement". Pastors were encouraged to issue questionnaires in order to determine what their flocks really needed, a tactic we have come to call surveying for "felt needs". Instead of church leadership being led by the Spirit and maintaining close enough personal relationships with its membership, it instead relied on the **flock** to tell them what they "felt" they needed. I remember so well the repeated results of such surveys as shared by other churches in my area, which seemed to echo the not unreasonable chorus, "We want to spend more quality time with our families". Far too many churches interpreted this to mean that church was taking up too much of people's time and that it held the most flexible spot for assuaging this problem, so Sunday evening services was the first to go. It is perplexing to fully comprehend why so many thought the solution was to spend **more** time in the world doing worldly things to the exclusion of the greater Body of Christ.

This was particularly ironic as the English meaning of "Laodicea" is "people's opinions"—the church in the Last Days is characterized as Jesus on the outside, knocking to get in while those on the inside run everything according to their opinions, or "felt needs". And it cannot be lost upon us that this movement, which reflects the dominant attitude and lifestyle of so many calling themselves "Christian" and attending church at least once a week, is greatly facilitated by social media in all its forms, but particularly Facebook. It is most often a morass of people's opinions striving to dominate and be heard.

As this trend to cut down on church continued, it reached a zenith for me by the late 90s when I returned to my home town after living out of state for a few years. Because I was not just familiar with the church I was returning to, but had literally grown up with many of its members, the senior pastor asked me to look into what was wrong with the youth group. There were 70-80 teens in the congregation, but probably only around a dozen who were regularly showing up to participate in Sunday School, a mid-week gathering, or any given event the new youth pastor sponsored. Was there a problem with that

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youth pastor which was being expressed by the absence of overall participation by that demographic?

In approaching their parents, some of whom I'd had long term relationships going back the nostalgia of our school days, it was shocking to learn that the number one reason for a lack of participation was at the **parents'** direct insistence. They had concluded that too much time at church as "unhealthy", and that their children needed to "balance" it out with school and community activities, hobbies, and of course family outings. By the time the Internet was going public and beginning to take such a prominent place in our personal life and workplace, this trend was already fully entrenched, and for all intents and purposes, attained institutionalized status. All the Internet did was to take something already in progress and greatly accelerate it, much like rocket engines forever changed aircraft and overall travel.

My greater point is that to warn at this very late date that Facebook is the metaphorical "last straw" and Christians need to draw the line and go no further is a very weak and late entry into the game, so to speak. Christians have been rehearsing the misappropriation of their time and resources for the last two or three **generations**. It didn't begin with Facebook and it won't end there.

This situation reminds me of a ministry locally based in my home town which at its inception had as its aim to change Hollywood by gaining personal entrance into that community so as to preach the Gospel. (We're located within reasonable driving distance to Satan's throne.) Over time, however, it was apparent that early successes gave way to irreversible influences whereby instead of bringing the **Gospel** into the entertainment capital of the world, the **world** took firm hold in that ministry. First there were lists of celebrities assigned the status of "Christian" with the caution not to "out" them so as to compromise their professional standing, and then eventually came the lists of "Christian approved" movies and television series—as if **any** of these things will pass muster on their day before the Great White throne. A little compromise leads to a little more, to a little more, and eventually to the entire other side of the river, so to speak. We took a little time from church, a little more, a little more, and it ultimately became "unhealthy" to be "too involved". (*"A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough."* – Gal. 5:9) We don't have a Facebook problem, we have a **discipleship** problem; we have a **commitment** problem; we have a loving Christ more than the world problem.

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¹⁴“For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵“To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. ¹⁶Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. ¹⁷In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹“Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’

²¹“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²²“Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’

²³“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. ²⁵And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

²⁶“But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. ²⁷Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. ²⁸Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’

²⁹“For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25:14–30)

It is particularly important to note the context in which Jesus provides this teaching, because it is the part of the Olivet Discourse where He is telling believers exactly what **they** should do and how **they** should behave until He returns, and both the consequences and rewards which **believers** will experience. The third example of

faithlessness with that which the Master entrusted him is not a warning to the **unsaved**, but the **saved!** This is preceded by the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13) which is also a warning to believers to stay awake and alert through the anointing of the Holy Spirit through Word as personified by the lamp and oil. As stated previously, we don't have a Facebook problem, we have a **discipleship** problem; we have a **commitment** problem; we have a loving Christ more than the world problem.

Now as to whether individual things such as Facebook are specifically the tool of Antichrist and therefore must be avoided at all cost, may I please suggest there are probably at the least two major biblical scenarios which we need to take under serious consideration. The first is the Apostle Paul's teaching that while there are some sins which are plainly defined in Scripture and for which there can be no discussion of compromise or reinterpretation, we **all** have a conscience with various degrees of sensitivity to things which are **not** outright sin across the board for everyone.

*¹³Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense...**whatever is not from faith is sin.** (Romans 14:13–20, 23b)*

The principle is to be aware that the very thing in which I have no problem engaging may cross the line for someone else's more sensitive conscience. Pertaining to the present discussion, this means if your conscience is telling you that Facebook or anything else in life (online or not) is not good for you, **don't do it!** A woman once confided that she realized the greatest stumbling block to her faith was romance novels. She couldn't put them down. She finally realized her problem when she had accomplished her entire grocery shopping trip and was waiting at the check-out while all the time reading from a romance novel she was carrying around. For her, it was sin. We shouldn't make fun of people who are sensitive to such prohibitions, and Lord help us if

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we're so insensitive that we actually become part of the problem by sarcastically intoning, "What's da matta with youse? Dat ain't nothin'!" I would first respectfully suggest that Facebook has not attained exclusive status as Antichrist's domain, but there is no doubt it probably has for **some**. Anything in this life to which the Holy Spirit testifies to your conscience is an immediate candidate for rejection, dismissal and forever letting go, no matter how benign it may be for someone else.

But secondly, for those of us who are going to try to use such things to reflect and preach an authentic Christianity, we **have** to be visibly distinguishable from the world. If our online presence—not to mention our relationships with family and friends, workplace demeanor, and overall presence in the world at large, away from the Internet cannot be differentiated from those of non-Christians, we have completely and utterly **failed**; not just online, but in real analog life in general! Perhaps one of the main reasons such teachings come along to warn that "this" or "that" may be a tool of the devil is because we insufficiently display a consistent image of Christ; we are simply no different.

*⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8–9)*

There is a very good possibility that a bad example in someone's use of Facebook is just the latest in a long chain of behavioral events. Such were not models of Christian behavior back in the MySpace days, before that during the temporary dynasty which was GeoCities, when they dialed in to BBS's before that, and perhaps in their progressive, overall detachment from church even before all this online stuff became available. In other words, is what many are railing about when it comes to Facebook just the latest installment of unchecked, unbiblical behavior exhibited everywhere else? Such can leave Facebook, but they'll just take the uncorrected problem with them to their next destination.

But for those who want to maintain a cyber presence that is authentically biblical and Christ-like, it begins by pursuing the same in real life. And it comes about not by acting in the same worldly character as the unsaved, but pursuing and exuding "*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,*

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whatever is of good repute". And the biblical variable at the heart of each of those endeavors is most certainly to be less of ourselves and far more of Christ.

We have been given all the time in the world, like no previous generation ever, to be salt and light to the world. But how are we handling what has been entrusted to us? When He returns, will we experience praise and a reward or judgment and loss?

In Him,

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