

How to Boil a Frog

M.W. Bassford
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Introduction.

- A. The central idea of this sermon actually comes from an analogy a friend of mine wanted to use in debate class back when I was in high school. Interestingly enough, the teacher wouldn't let him use it. She said it was too graphic. However, since I've remembered the story for 15 years now, I'm going to use it anyway.
- B. The story goes like this: Let's say you've got a live frog, and you want to boil this live frog for whatever reason. How do you do it? The way NOT to do it is to bring your pot of water up to a boil and then dump the frog in. If you do that, as soon as the frog comes in contact with the boiling water, he will recognize his danger and hop out, and you'll spend the next half hour chasing a frog around the kitchen. Instead, the way to do it is to put the frog in a pot of nice warm water on the stove and gradually, gradually, turn up the heat. Because there is no dramatic change in temperature, the frog will not realize his danger until he is dead.
- C. Now, folks, this is a purely anecdotal story. No animals were harmed in the making of this sermon; I have not tried this myself, and I would strongly discourage anyone in the junior high class, for instance, from trying it either. However, it does a wonderful job of illustrating the way that Satan works on all of us. Satan's no dummy; he knows that if he presents us with some hard-core sin right off the bat that's miles away from anything we do right now, we're not going to go for it. Instead, Satan seduces us gradually, by means of sins that do not appear to differ greatly from what we're doing right now. He kills us by degrees. For the sake of our souls, all of us need to understand this, so let's look at the spiritual version of how to boil a frog.

I. Create an Enticing Environment.

- A. The first step the devil takes in his spiritual frog-boiling is to create an enticing environment. He doesn't want the water too hot; then, his frog hops out of the pot and tries to escape. He doesn't want it too cold, either; that's neither terribly attractive nor terribly destructive. Instead, Satan starts out with some nice warm water, just like the swamp back home, only without the snakes, and that's where he starts his victims.
- B. Let's look at how Satan does this in the first sin ever committed, in Genesis 3:4-6. I have to tell you, folks, if the devil were a human being, he'd make a fortune as a fruit salesman. Doesn't that sound good? That fruit is just hanging there on the branch, as pretty and ripe as it can be. It looks good, it smells good, and best of all, when you eat it, you get to be as wise as God is. What a sales pitch! Of course, it doesn't work on us today, because we know how things turned out when Eve listened to the sales pitch.
- C. But what about all of the sales pitches the devil uses on us every day? Those are a lot harder to spot, aren't they? Too often, we fixate on the fruit, and we forget about the aftertaste. How about all of those wonderful TV shows out there? *Desperate Housewives*, *The Sopranos*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and so forth. We all know what belongs on the list. They win all kinds of awards, they've got great storylines and great acting, but we can't even watch a preview for one of them without seeing somebody get naked. Is that an innocent delight given to us by God, or is it a temptation being dangled in front of us by Satan? There's no third way.
- D. Whenever we're dealing with any of Satan's enticing fruit, we need to remember not just the short-term promise, but the long-term consequences. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: sin is sin for a REASON. God doesn't tell us not to do things because He enjoys making up rules; He does it because those things are bad for us and will destroy us if we practice them. Every sin separates us from God, but it also comes with unpleasant physical results too. All of the devil's fruit has worms in it. Look at the worm that Solomon describes in the case of the adulterous woman in Proverbs 7:21-23. The proverbial fool follows after her in search of carnal pleasure, but the pleasure he takes turns out to cost him his life.

II. Get the Subject in the Environment.

- A. Once Satan has gone through the first step, once he's got his pot of warm comfy water, his next step is to get the subject in the environment. This is easy if you're dealing with frogs. Just dump the frog in the pot and you're in business. It's harder for Satan, because, thankfully, he can't force us to do anything. Instead, he has to persuade us that inside that pot is the place where we want to be.
- B. There's one key tool that Satan loves to use to do this, and that's encouraging us to take baby steps into sin. He lures us with some sin that is so close to something we're already doing that we just can't believe it would make a spiritual difference. He deceives us into thinking that we can follow our own lusts into this teeny-tiny sin, yet still be counted by God as faithful. This approach is extremely subtle, yet extremely effective.
- C. Look at how the devil used it to entrap the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon. We see the beginning of this story in 1 Kings 11:1-2. We can't be sure, of course, but here's what Solomon was probably thinking. For kings of that era, it was common to marry the daughters of neighboring nations to seal alliances. That's why Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh mentioned here. Then, Solomon started arranging marriages with

the daughters of the kings of the nations nearby. It was just like what he was doing already! Treaties, alliances, and a new wife into the bargain! What could go wrong? The problem was that God had specifically commanded the children of Israel not to do what Solomon was now doing. Solomon had sinned.

- D. Now, for some reason, friends, once we start down the path of baby steps to sin, there's something within us that wants to deny the significance of what we're doing. We want to believe that we can willfully stray from God's will in some area that we think is small enough and still be by and large a good Christian. It reminds me of all of those paint-color displays they have in the hardware stores. They have one shade of true white, but then they have dozens of shades of almost-white. We want to take the black-and-white standards of the Bible and turn white into almost-white, or maybe even a light gray, and say that it's all the same thing.
- E. There's nothing new about this exercise. Look at the interaction of Jesus and the Pharisees described in Luke 16:13-14. Jesus here is warning the Pharisees that they have a serious spiritual problem. They love money. The Pharisees, though, just can't accept that their greed has separated them from God. They still carry out their fasts, don't they? They still pray daily, don't they? And so they think to themselves that by and large, they're still good Jews, and they close their ears to the words of Jesus, and they mock Him instead. We need to make sure that we don't do the same thing. We need to make sure that when God's word calls us to a higher standard of righteousness, that we obey instead of being satisfied with what we think is good enough.
- F. There's yet another problem associated with being enticed into the world, though. As we follow that enticement, we lose the distinctive holiness that sets us apart from the world and allows Christ to use us to save souls. Consider the words of our Lord in Matthew 5:13. What Jesus is telling us is that we have got to be different. Now, this is not the difference that comes from doing goofy stuff just for the sake of being different. This is the difference that comes from our determination to follow in the steps of Christ. Jesus was as different as He could be, not because being different was His goal, but because being holy was His goal.
- G. We have to be holy too. That holiness, that aura of having a different purpose and a better, happier life, that is what will make the people around us want to be like us. Our calling in Christ is to reach out to the people who want to be better too. If we aren't better, if the only difference between us and the world is that we go to church once a week, we might as well save our breath in talking to people, because we haven't got anything that the true seeker is going to want. Let's be lights instead, so that we can lead others to God.

III. Turn up the Heat.

- A. If we fail to do this, though, if we allow Satan to get us in the pot where he wants us, we'll soon see the next step in his plan, which is to turn up the heat. Once again, this is a gradual process. Satan doesn't set the dial to "Nuke" as soon as we're in the water. Instead, he turns the burner up slowly, until finally, the heat where we are reaches a level that is both life-destroying and soul-destroying.
- B. We see how Satan did this with Solomon in 1 Kings 11:3-4. Remember how the devil started him off with the "little" sin of marrying all those foreign wives? Now, we see the consequences of that sin. It opened Solomon up to idolatry. His love for those women caused him to leave behind his love for God. I guarantee you, folks, if you had gone up to Solomon on the day he dedicated the temple and told him that he would become an idolater, he would have been appalled, but that's exactly how Satan gets us to appalling things: through baby steps that seem reasonable. This wasn't a decision that Solomon made in a few weeks. Instead, the Scripture tells us that he only worshiped idols once he became old. His falling away was the culmination of a process that took decades. Satan is a patient guy, folks. He's willing to invest years and years of work in us with little immediate result if the long-term result of all that work will be the destruction of our souls.
- C. However, just as little baby-step sins lead us to other sins that don't appear so little, so the baby steps themselves get bigger and bigger as we continue to follow Satan. Look at what Paul says about the future false teachers in 2 Timothy 3:13. They wouldn't just stay the same. Instead, they would go from bad to worse. That's the way that all sin is. It's never stable. We don't start sinning and just plateau there. Instead, Satan uses our existing sin to drag us down more and more. Let me give you an example. Let's say that our daughter is on a soccer team that's made it to the playoffs, but there's a playoff game on Sunday night. The coach calls us, says he knows that we normally have church on Sunday night, but can't we make an exception just this once? And so we agree, and go to the ball game instead of church. The year after that, all the ball games take precedence. The year after that, we let our kids miss church if they have homework. Finally, we find ourselves missing services for any reason whatsoever, down to just Sunday mornings, because it's not that much different. Now, folks, I'm not going to get up here and tell you that the Bible says that it's a sin to miss Sunday-night services. But the Bible does say it's a sin to put God second. You do the math.
- D. Now, we might say to ourselves, "That could never happen to me! My little sins don't affect me that way!" That attitude, friends, is a sign that our little sins already have affected us. Look at what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:1-2. Folks, the searing of the conscience isn't just limited to false teaching. It's the result of any sin. As we continue to practice evil, we lose the ability to discern that it is evil. We've wrecked the guide that God has given us. Let's protect our consciences instead, so that they will keep us from the baby steps of sin.

Conclusion. If you're walking in those baby steps, if you're in the water, now is the time to repent.