

make us believe the worst about God, others and ourselves. He is a murderer who is always and in every way our enemy. He disguises himself as an angel of light, trying to confuse us and prevent us from resisting his attacks. And he is a thief who is constantly trying to steal, kill and destroy all that is good in our lives. Whenever our faith, hope and love are being challenged or removed, we know who is ultimately responsible: satan! But we do not have to let him get away with his evil plans. We can resist him. We can overcome him. And we can cast him down by the power and authority of Jesus Christ Who lives and rules within us.

The Names and Character of the Holy Spirit

Just as satan comes alongside to resist and destroy you, so the Holy Spirit is called alongside to strengthen you. Just as satan injects his spontaneous thoughts of destructiveness into your mind, so the Holy Spirit injects spontaneous thoughts of life into your heart. Let us now consider the character and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Comforter

At the very core of satan's nature is accusation. The essence of the Holy Spirit's nature is to comfort us with words of truth. "He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever; that is, the Spirit of Truth..." (Jn. 14:16,17a). The words the Spirit speaks will be calming, soothing, consoling. Even when conviction and correction are necessary, they will come to us with gentleness and solace. They will be gracious, and full of compassion and hope. They will lift our hearts and bring a breath of life to our broken spirits.

When I became aware of the central nature of the thoughts being dropped into my mind by satan and the Holy Spirit, I began to keep track of whose words I listened to most of the time. Whose words most easily claimed my attention? Whose words found fertile ground in my mind where they could grow and bring forth their own fruit?

I was appalled by what I discovered. At that time in my life, I was listening to satanic accusation, lies and condemnation approximately 80% of the time. I received and gave my attention to the comforting life-giving words of the Spirit only about 20% of the time. No wonder I walked through life constantly feeling condemned, accused and depressed.

We must all commit ourselves to searching our minds, expelling all negative, accusing thoughts and embracing all thoughts of comfort and consolation. We must become diligent to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We must not let satan win the battle within our minds, for victory on that front clears the way for control of the very words that we speak and the way that we act.

How specifically can we cast the accuser down from our minds and bring every thought under the authority of Jesus? It is not difficult. It does not take great prayer or faith. What it does require is diligent watchfulness. The moment we become aware of a negative, destructive thought within our minds, we must instantly reject it and replace it with a positive word of truth from the Word and the Spirit. When satan whispers, "You will fail," the Spirit counters, "Have faith in God." Satan says, "You are inadequate," the Holy Spirit breathes, "You have all adequacy through My power." Satan claims, "You are alone," the Holy Spirit promises, "I am with you always. I will never leave you nor forsake you."

You *can* choose whom you will listen to. Even when your faith is low and your heart cannot say an amen to the words of the Spirit, hold on to the words of truth. Do not let your emotions determine whose thoughts you will embrace. Hold fast to the word of God and your emotions will eventually be stirred and lifted to praise, comfort and joy.

The Spirit of Truth

We have already touched on the fact that the Holy Spirit speaks only words of truth. While Satan is a liar from the beginning, there is no shadow of error, inaccuracy or deception to be found in the Holy One.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (Jn. 16:13).

Truth liberates! Jesus said, “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (Jn. 6:63). Satan tries to bind us with his lies. The Spirit of truth sets us free. Lies destroy us. Truth gives us life.

As we read God’s Word prayerfully, spend time listening to God speak directly to us through journaling, and abide in His presence, He speaks through the effortless, spontaneous flow within. We must choose to incubate His words of truth that they might bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness in our lives (Jas. 3:18). We must be diligent to guard our minds that only thoughts of comfort and truth be allowed to remain unchallenged. Consider the chart on the following page. Covenant within your heart that the moment you become aware of a satanic lie within your mind, such as those in column one, you will instantly reject it, cast it down and replace it with the eternal Word of Truth, as seen in column two.

The Convincer

The Holy Spirit is always seeking to comfort us by lighting words of truth upon our minds. This peaceful, gracious nature infuses every aspect of His work in our lives, even when He must speak to us concerning our sin.

“And He, when He comes, will convict (convince) the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8).

The word “convict” would be better translated “convince.” The concept of conviction usually has a negative connotation in our minds. However, when the Holy Spirit points out sin in our lives, He does so in a totally positive manner. He gently calls us upward to greater righteousness rather than driving us down with guilt and condemnation. He positively draws us to change our minds and our actions through His love and grace.

Satan runs roughshod over your personality, wanting only to dominate and destroy you. The Holy Spirit is always a Gentleman, gently entreating you to set aside sin, to put on righteousness and to recognize righteous judgment. He is the “Spirit of Life,” setting you free from sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Satan drives; the Holy Spirit draws. Satan demands, the Holy Spirit entreats.

The Edifier

The comforting words of truth which convince us of sin and righteousness will always result in our edification. If we are obedient to His words, we will never leave the presence of God without being built up within our spirits.

“One who prophesies speaks to men for edification...” (I Cor. 14:3).

| Satan's Thoughts: Negative, Destructive | God's Thoughts: Positive, Upbuilding |
|---|---|
| I can't... | I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). |
| I lack... | My God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). |
| I fear... | God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). |
| I don't have faith... | God has given to me a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3). |
| I'm weak... | The Lord is the strength of my life (Ps. 27:1). |
| Satan has really got me... | Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world (I Jn. 4:4). |
| I'm defeated... | God always causes me to triumph in Christ Jesus (II Cor. 2:14). |
| I don't know what to do... | Christ Jesus is made unto me wisdom from God (I Cor. 1:30). |
| I expect to get sick once in a while... | By His stripes I am healed (Is. 53:5). Jesus Himself took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses (Matt. 8:17). |
| I am so worried and frustrated... | I can cast all my cares upon Him, because He cares for me (I Pet. 5:7). |
| I'm in bondage... | Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (II Cor. 3:17). |
| I feel so condemned... | There is no condemnation to me, because I am in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). |

When the Comforter speaks to His Church through prophecy, His first order of business is to edify or build up. Even when pointing to sin and error, the element of instruction and hope will always result in the listener being encouraged and strengthened.

According to the judgment of the Law, we deserve to be destroyed. According to the grace of Christ, we have eternal life. We may be approached, by others and within our own minds, in two ways: 1) with the Law, followed by judgment, or 2) with grace and mercy, through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. We must be diligent to accept only those words which minister grace, life and edification. Further, we must be careful to *speak* only those words which encourage, build up and ignite hope. We have become ministers of reconciliation, not messengers of doom and destruction.

How do you react when you have sinned? Are you able to receive the grace and mercy Christ offers when you repent? Are you able to get back up when you fall and move on in the Spirit? Or must you wallow about in your guilt for a time, bemoaning your sinful condition, mentally flogging yourself for failing yet again?

I have a hard time accepting the forgiveness of Christ. When I have failed, especially in an area which has often been my downfall in the past, I somehow feel that there must be something more for me to do before I can be restored than just repent. How often have I come before the Lord in journaling, crying out in sorrow and repentance. He gently replies, "I forgive you, son." I continue, "But, Lord, You don't know how sorry I am." Again He says, "I forgive you, My child." But something drives me to continue berating myself, unwilling or unable to embrace His cleansing and

strength to move on in His righteousness. Finally He breaks through with the words, “Mark, I have forgiven you. Won’t you forgive yourself?”

For so many years I lived with guilt and condemnation, mistakenly believing that it was my Father God Who was condemning me. It was only through learning to hear His voice that I was able to break free from the bondage of the enemy’s lies into freedom and forgiveness. The Bible says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). I believed in my heart that this was true but it was not a reality in my life. There was condemnation to me, even though I was in Christ! Only through seeing and hearing God within my own heart was I able to recognize the true source of condemnation. When I really got to know God, I found Him to be so much more gracious and forgiving, so much less judgmental than I had imagined Him to be.

The Exhorter/Teacher

“One who prophesies speaks unto men...exhortation” (I Cor. 14:3). “The Comforter...will teach you all things” (Jn. 14:26).

“Exhort” is another one of those words which has taken on a different connotation than that intended by the author and translator. Some seem to think that exhortation is the time to “let another have it,” often more closely resembling the work of the accuser than the work of the Comforter.

The literal definition of exhortation (*parakaleo* in the Greek) is “to call a person to the side to encourage some course of conduct, always looking to the future.” Notice how close it is to *parakletos*, which is translated “Comforter.”

Exhortation is thus distinctive in three ways: 1) We call a person to the side. We do not generally correct a person in public. We wait until we can speak in private, if possible. 2) We are encouraging to some course of conduct. We are not simply reciting his errors. Most of us are all too aware of our sin and failure. We do not need another pointing them out to us. What we need is assistance in breaking free from our bondage; specific constructive suggestions that will help us live the life of godliness we aspire to. 3) Exhortation always looks toward the future. We do not wallow around in the past.

A perfect example of proper exhortation is Jesus' response to the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:3-11). According to the law, she was guilty and worthy of death. But Jesus went beyond the law and offered mercy, grace and pardon. He spoke one simple sentence to her: "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." He didn't lecture, moralize or sermonize, as I would be tempted to do. Instead, in those few words He offered pardon, acceptance and encouragement toward wholeness. Again, there was no need to point out her sin. It was ever before her. In the same way, the kiss of love, coupled with the word of exhortation, can often bring healing to our broken lives. And, if we are willing, we can be used by the Spirit to bring wholeness to others in the same way.

If we believe that the Lord wants us to exhort another, we must remember that all exhortation is to be done lovingly (I Cor. 13), gently (Gal. 6:1), patiently (I Thess. 5:14), with great mercy (II Cor. 1:3b) and with a desire to comfort (II Cor. 1:3c). We must "let no unwholesome word proceed from [our] mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification,

according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:29,30a).

Summary

In summary, let’s look at a Psalm of Asaph, Psalm 73. It is a rather long chapter so I will not include it all here, but I encourage you to read the entire psalm, not just the verses below.

Asaph begins: “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, As I saw the prosperity of the wicked....”

Asaph begins with a pure heart but suddenly he loses his divine perspective, focuses his eyes on the lifestyle of the arrogant and wicked, and his heart is contaminated. Instead of seeing God, he sees men. Instead of listening to truth, he accepts the lies of the enemy. As you read verses 4 through 15, it is clear that the father of lies is at work in his mind. There are some facts given: “Pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them...The imaginations of their heart run riot. They mock....” It is all true. However, mixed in with these facts are some lies, which Asaph is accepting as truth: “There are no pains in their death...They are not in trouble as other men; Nor are they plagued like mankind....” Not true! From the outside, to the envious eye, it may appear that they are leading a charmed life, but it simply is not so. Asaph is reasoning outside of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and when we do that, we quickly reason ourselves into a hole in the ground.

However, Asaph is wise enough not to remain in that con-

dition. He knows where to go to find truth. He knows that in order to restore his pure heart, he must regain divine perspective. Finally, in verse 17, he begins the process of restoration: "I came into the sanctuary of God...." In the following verses, we read his journaling, the response of God to his complaint and unspoken question. First, God shows him the truth about the wicked. "They are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!" In a few words, or perhaps a picture, God brings the light of truth into the darkness of satan's lies and they are undone.

Next God shows Asaph the truth about himself. "When my heart was embittered...I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before Thee...." When I live and think and reason outside of His presence, when I accept lies as truth, I am as senseless as a wild beast. "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, And afterward receive me to glory." Though Asaph was deceived, though he sinned and lost sight of his God, yet he was not forsaken. When he saw his own sin, superimposed upon it he saw the mercy and grace of his God. No wonder the chapter closes with worship! When we see God and His truth is revealed within, our hearts are purified, communion is restored and joy breaks forth like the morning.

This is the same process we must go through. When we lose divine perspective, when we cannot see God's hand and our minds are clouded by the mixture of truth and error, we too must come into the sanctuary of God. We too must come into His presence, pour out our doubts, angers and fears, and allow Him to speak in response. Only through His voice and His vision can we be made whole.

Response

As you have read this chapter, have you become aware of satan's work in your mind? Have you begun to see more clearly the difference between the voice of the accuser and the Comforter? Have you recognized generalized negatives and outright lies from the enemy which you were accepting and incubating? Have you seen God at work in your life and circumstances?

Take some time right now to come into the sanctuary of God. Quiet your heart, tune to the spontaneous voice and vision of Jesus and write out your questions, doubts and fears in prayer to God. Then make sure you listen for His response and look for His vision. Record what you see and hear. Rejoice in the goodness of God!