

Stop Blaming the Devil!

So many Christians focus their energy on fighting Satan when we should be humbling ourselves before God. Find out why the devil may not be your problem.

When was the last time you ran a reality check on your perceptions of God's Word? Too many believers embrace popular misunderstandings of what God has said rather than the truth. According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, understanding God's truth means your perceptions become aligned with God's reality of the thing being perceived. One area in which the perceptions of believers do not line up with the truth relates to our understanding of how we are to deal with the devil. Many Christians believe we should order Satan around with great fervor, frequency and volume.

Satan cooperates with this deception, conceding victories whenever necessary to perpetuate the lie that God's people need to battle him for everything God has promised them. This deception keeps earnest Christians too busy with Satan to focus on humbling and surrendering themselves to God.

But God is more concerned about the state of our souls than He is about the devil. He says in His Word, "'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves [their souls], and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways [of their souls], then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their [souls'] sin and heal their land' " (2 Chr. 7:14, NKJV). The Hebrew word for wicked (ways), *ra*, includes characteristics of being disagreeable and having an unhappy disposition.

God is telling us that what will bring about the healing of the land is His people's turning away from wrong attitudes and self-centeredness. He does not say anything about warring with

Satan to heal the land.

Daniel understood the need for humility and repentance. He prayed and confessed the corporate wrong agreement of God's people when they were in captivity in Babylon: "We have sinned and dealt perversely and done wickedly and have rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and have not earnestly begged for forgiveness and entreated the favor of the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and have understanding and become wise in Your truth" (Dan. 9:5,13, The Amplified Bible).

The Israelites had been and still were actively entering into wrong agreements about what God was saying to them through His prophets. These wrong agreements had created "legal" grounds for Satan to establish a territorial dominion over them, controlled by the demonic prince of Persia. Wrong agreement always gives right of access to Satan's workings.

Daniel knew that surrender and obedience were the solutions to the Israelites' bondage. When he sought right agreement with God through confessing the sins of his people and repenting, God swiftly sent the archangels Gabriel and Michael to take out the prince of Persia. Note that God did not say Daniel or the Israelites needed to fight Satan over their bondage.

Plans for Satan's Destruction

It is man's desires for power, status and riches that allow evil spirits to harass human souls. These same desires are cunningly promoted by Satan as requirements for "power-Christian" status.

But is "power Christianity"—constant warring with the enemy—God's plan for Satan's ultimate destruction? I don't think so.

In Ephesians 3:9-10 Paul gives us a clue to God's will for the body of Christ on earth: "To make all see what is the

fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (NKJV, emphasis added). The terms "principalities and powers" here mean "demonic forces," as it does in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Considering 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Daniel 9:5,13 along with Ephesians 3:10, we see an interesting truth emerge. God's manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10) will be made known through the church to principalities, powers and rulers of darkness when the body of Christ comes into alignment with 2 Chronicles 7:14, using Daniel 9:5-13 as a pattern for prayer.

And I believe God's manifold wisdom may be the exact opposite of the charismatic "power-Christianity" being modeled today. Regardless of how contemporary Christian songs portray him as a fool, Satan is quite aware that he will ultimately go down. However, he may not know how he will be brought down.

Perhaps he believes he will be known in eternal history as the only entity with whom God Himself ever had to personally war. But what if God's manifold wisdom is to use His own children, humble lambs with servant-like natures, as conduits of His power to take Satan down? Wouldn't that be the ultimate humiliation—to be defeated by sheeplike believers with no personal strength to match Satan's own destructive powers?

We'd be just God's kids counting on His promises that He would use us to fulfill His great purposes. If Christians could see their lives through the perspective of such a plan, it would help clarify what misunderstandings must be put away in order to be a part.

Surrender and Obey

When we are unaware that our Christian walks are not centered in God's truth, we will often make wrong choices to accommodate our souls' unhealed hurts, unmet needs, fears and doubts. All of us have made wrong choices, as Jonah did when he ran from God, and had to suffer the consequences. But today we're being taught to "rebuke" the consequences of those bad choices.

This is ridiculous. No human being could have rebuked or cast Jonah's whale-sized consequence from him! Yet after Jonah prayed and surrendered his own will, trusting in the mercy of God, God commanded the whale to vomit Jonah onto dry land (see Jon. 2:7-10). What a concept!

There is a catch, however. When God delivers you from a tough consequence He expects you to realize that He is delivering you to put you back on track with His will. Beware of casually walking away from a divine intervention in your circumstances to pursue your life in the manner that led you into the whale's belly in the first place! God has little patience for that.

Many struggling Christians are embracing the wrong idea that they can confess away the consequences of their self-willed choices. They are being taught to rebuke or command Satan's "hindrances" out of their paths, with little understanding that most of the hindrances have been self-created.

Brothers and sisters, you cannot command or rebuke consequences out of your way; you must surrender and obey your way through them. Obedience always brings grace to the one who seeks to avoid getting back into the same circumstances.

If you are stiff-necked and stubborn, God may lift His grace and let consequences ride over you like a herd of elephants. Try confessing, casting or commanding elephants out of your path!

Consequences from choosing to believe wrong teaching will almost always have industrial-strength Velcro all over them, sticking to everything we try to do. If we could just admit, "God, nothing I've tried works!" and ask Him, "Why do I keep doing this to myself, and how can I stop?"

I believe He would answer: "You have wrong ideas and are depending on wrong things. You cannot command your way out of a spiritual mess; you have to obey your way out of it! You're going to have to let your wrong understanding go, and trust Me to teach you the truth that will set you free."

Faith, Fear and Finances

Three areas in which we have embraced misunderstanding rather than the truth of what God has said are faith, fear and finances. Extreme teachings on these topics are setting up many Christians for delusion about the source of their troubles and causing them to doubt in God's faithfulness.

Faith is being taught as a force, a weapon to use against Satan and a means of "spiritual financing" for what the human soul wants. Charismatic teachers often say that faith is a tangible spiritual force with the ability to produce natural substance.

But Paul used the Greek word hypostasis ("substance") in Hebrews 11:1, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," to mean "a steadfast mind having courage, resolve, confidence and trust in God's goodness" (Thayer's). Nothing in Hebrews 11:1 implies a tangible substance that can be produced by what a human mind conceives and desires.

New Testament Greek almost always defines "faith" as "having trust and confidence in the goodness, wisdom and power of God." God has a most excellent future for each one of us here on Earth—good works to do, good paths to walk in and good lives to live (see Eph. 2:10, The Amplified Bible). Stepping fully into this excellent future requires obedience and

surrender to His will.

My best prayers seek the alignment of my will on Earth with His will in heaven. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus said, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, NKJV). So, the best prayer I can pray is: "I bind my will to your will, God. Your will be done."

When I live in accordance with this prayer, I don't have to figure out how to save the world, my family, my bank account or my reputation—or how to save myself from the devil. I just need to obey what God has said. True faith is a place of rest and peace because it trusts an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God to take care of all of the details. He doesn't need my input to get them right.

Regardless of how much faith we have, disobedience to what God has said allows Satan to get involved in our lives. Let me give you an example. Ephesians 4:26 says we are not to let the sun go down on our anger. If we choose to ignore this command and retire with anger still festering in our hearts, we open the door to bitterness, resentment and other evil works.

And justifying our actions does not absolve us of wrongdoing. How often God must wonder, "What part of Ephesians 4:26 don't they get?" Rationalizing and justifying are the timber and bricks of the strongholds in our souls, and Ephesians 4:27 (The Amplified Bible) tells of their consequence: They give the devil a foothold in us. Satan uses such access to attack believers in spite of their authority, blood covering and righteousness in Christ.

Authority is always hindered, even rendered useless, by the presence of open doors that an enemy can access. Military leaders know their highest levels of authority are useless if they have open doors in their supply sources and communication lines. There isn't a smart enemy alive—including Satan—who won't use such doors to attack, slash and burn.

We have been told exactly what to do to see God heal our land, and we have not done it. We have become too power and authority conscious to humble ourselves as God instructed.

Fear is another subject of extreme teachings today. Many people have been taught that there is a demonic spirit of fear. This teaching is generally based on 2 Timothy 1:7, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (KJV).

The NIV translation is clearer, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." Thayer's defines pneuma (spirit) as it is used here to mean "being filled with the same spirit as Christ, and by the bond of that spirit to be intimately united to Christ." In other words, regenerated human spirits are not timid, having no room for fear because they are filled with the Spirit of Christ.

Fear is a symptom of an unresolved issue in the soul that keeps churning out emotional confusion, doubt and lack of trust. As long as any such unresolved issue exists and is fiercely guarded by self-constructed strongholds, the enemy can apply pressure in circumstances that mimic those out of which the fear was birthed in the first place.

Fear is not an evil spirit; it is an emotional response to a lack of trust and confidence in the goodness of God. You cannot be delivered of a lack of trust or have stronghold-protected wrong thinking, damaged emotions and unresolved issues cast out of your soul.

And God won't dismantle your strongholds. That would be a violation of your soul's attempts to guard itself. You have to choose to tear them down (see 2 Cor. 10:3-5) and give God voluntary access to heal you.

Finances is another area of extreme teaching today. I have visited several charismatic ministry Web sites and come away

concerned regarding advice about finances. One Web site encouraged financially strapped people to confess: "My debt is gone. I have no debt. My bills are paid!"

There is no scriptural basis for such a confession regarding unpaid bills. If God were to deliver some Christians from their debt without teaching them to have a paradigm shift in thinking about money, these Christians would get in debt again. If we do not learn why we are always living in lack, any reprieve from God will be only a stopgap. God could make millionaires out of all of us, but He wisely chooses not to—at least not until we bring our understanding of finances into alignment with His.

God has never said His kingdom work is dependent on human wealth. Rather, it is "dependent" on the condition of the hearts of those who want His will done, even if it requires that their entire financial wealth be surrendered to Him.

I believe that money in itself means very little to God, that He created it only to teach us about our own motives. God is concerned about what money means to the one who wants it. Money is not the answer to our deepest needs.

Praying Right Prayers

Consider the times God has seemed not to answer your prayers when you asked for what you consider to be good things. Why didn't He come through? God doesn't answer our finest prayers if what we've asked for: would enable us to stay rooted in wrong understanding would allow us to hold onto something we need to release would enable us to follow a path away from His will.

God does not always respond to prayers, even those initiated out of great need, when the human soul is seeking a wrong answer. He does always respond, however, to obedience and surrender in the soul of a believer who has humbled himself and turned from his own personal agendas and wicked ways.

I believe God has said, "If you want to get everything you pray for, pray right prayers." Right prayers issue forth from a heart that desires to see His truth manifested and His will being done—and makes itself available to help carry out His will.

God doesn't need Christians who will take on the devil. He needs Christians who will humble themselves and trust in Him. He can take care of the power stuff Himself!

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