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The Accuser of the Saints

by David Dunlap

You would think that Satan, after having led a believer into sin, would leave him there to suffer the consequences; but this is not what happens. Satan has another tactic to leave the believer doubly defeated. Before we sin—while Satan is tempting us—he whispers, “You *can* get away with this!” Then after we sin, he shouts at us, “You *will never* get away with this!” Have you ever heard Satan’s hateful voice in your heart and conscience? It is enough to make a Christian give up in despair. After the believer falls, Satan moves in for his finishing blow. He attacks us in heart and conscience. “So you are a Christian?” he sneers. “You are not a very good Christian! You go to church, you read your Bible, you even seek to serve the Lord. And look what you have done! If your friends at church knew the kind of Christian you really were, they would throw you out!” The Christian quickly discovers how subtle and merciless Satan really is.

Satan’s Accusations

When Satan talks to you about God, he lies. But when he talks to God about you, he usually tells the truth! He is the “accuser of the brethren.” He has access to heaven, to the very throne of God; and there he reminds God of the condition of His saints. You and I know about these accusations because we feel them in our own hearts and consciences.

“See what Abraham just did? He lied about his wife!”

“Did you see what David did? He committed adultery with his neighbor’s wife, and then killed her husband! Judge him! Judge him!”

“Were you listening, God did you just hear Peter curse and swear and deny your Son three times? Are you going to let him get away with that?”

If you still feel guilty after you acknowledge your sin and have remembered that you are forgiven, Satan is employing his favorite tactic of accusing the conscience. Satan does not want you to remember God’s full and complete forgiveness. Satan is the great accuser of the saints.

It is important that we learn to distinguish between Satan’s accusations and the Spirit’s conviction. A feeling of guilt and shame is a good thing when it comes from the Spirit of God. But we listen to the Devil, it will only lead to regret, remorse, and defeat.

When the Spirit of God convicts you, he uses the Word of God in love and seeks to bring you back into fellowship with your Father. When Satan accuses you, he uses your own sins in a hateful way, and seeks to make you feel helpless and hopeless. Judas listened to the devil and went out and

“Satan is a great coward—he will generally meddle with God’s people when they are down. I find that whenever I get depressed in spirit—then comes the hissing serpent—“God has forsaken you! You are no child of God! You are unfaithful to your Master!”

C. H. Spurgeon
(1834-1893)
Sermon Jan. 22, 1865

hanged himself. Peter looked at the face of Jesus and wept bitterly, but later came back into fellowship with Christ.

When you listen to the devil's accusations, you open yourself up to despair and spiritual paralysis. "My situation is hopeless!" Many fallen Christians say, "I'm too far gone—the Lord could never take me back." When you have that helpless, hopeless feeling, you can be sure Satan is accusing you. He wants you to feel guilty. He wants you to experience regret and remorse, but not repentance. He wants to keep accusing you, so that you focus your attention on yourself and on your sins. Satan is pleased as long as you are feeling guilty, as long as you feel condemned by God, and you are moving farther and farther from the Lord.

However, once you look by faith at the Lord Jesus Christ and confess your sins, you will find cleansing and restoration of fellowship. True conviction from the Spirit of God will move you closer to the Lord. However, we must warn the believer that when you feel true conviction, act upon and do not put it off. It is an awesome thing to neglect the conviction of God. We have the tendency to think and not to act, the tendency to feel and not to act. If we go on feeling and thinking without acting, someday we will be unable to respond. In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, the well-known writer C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) warned:

*"The more often he (a Christian) feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel."*¹

Satan wants you to feel guilty. Your heavenly Father wants you to know that you are forgiven. Satan knows that if you live under a dark cloud of guilt, you will not be able to witness effectively or serve the Lord with power and blessing. Sad to say, there are some churches that major in guilt. They seem to feel that unless a Christian goes home from a service feeling like a failure, the service has not been a blessing. There is a proper place for biblical exhortation; but we must not focus on guilt. To do so is to play into the devil's hands. Excessive guilt and sorrow can only lead to depression and despair. Sometimes it leads to destruction; even Christians have been known to attempt suicide in order to escape Satanic accusation. What, then, is your defense against Satan's attacks? It is the intercessory work of Christ.

Intercession: The Unfinished Work of Christ

It is true that Satan stands in God's presence to accuse us. But it is also true that Jesus Christ stands at God's right hand to intercede for us! Our Lord finished His work on earth and returned to heaven to take up His unfinished work. What is this unfinished work? As our High Priest, Jesus Christ intercedes for us and provides the grace that we need when we are tempted. If by faith we come to the throne of grace, He will see us through to victory. But if we yield to temptation and sin, then He ministers as our advocate to forgive us and restore us to fellowship once again.

Picture once again the courtroom scene in heaven. God is on His throne. Satan stands before God to accuse the believer. The believer is guilty of all the sins and iniquities of which Satan indicts him. But Jesus Christ is at God's right hand to represent the believer and restore him. The Lord Jesus stands bearing the wounds of Calvary in his body. Those wounds are the everlasting evidence that he died for our sins—past, present, and future. God was merciful and gracious to save us when we first trusted Christ, but now He is "faithful and righteous" to restore us when we confess our sins to him. He is faithful to keep his promises.

"The more often he (a Christian) feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel."

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

The Screwtape Letters

There is a wonderful picture in the Old Testament of Christ's intercessory work for believers. Today, in heaven, Christ continually represents believers before the Father. We might describe this work of Christ as bearing believers upon His heart continually. We have a similar picture drawn from the work of the high priest in the Old Testament. He would go into the Tabernacle and enter the presence of God to burn incense, a picture of prayer. When the High Priest entered he would wear a special vestment of twelve precious stones over his heart, which represented the names of the children of Israel. God said, "And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel...over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually" (Ex. 28:29).

This is a beautiful picture of how Jesus Christ continually appears before the throne of God bearing your name upon His heart. Jesus Himself promised, "I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). He is always ready to represent the believer. He is always ready to restore the saint of God.

Does God close His eyes to the reality of the believer's sins? Of course not! God will never defend His children's sins—but He will defend His children. When Abraham went down to Egypt in disobedience, and there lied about his wife, God did not defend Abraham's sins; but He did defend Abraham. He kept the Egyptian ruler from defiling Sarah, and He helped Abraham get out of the land safely. Abraham suffered the consequences of that adventure. But God still ruled and overruled to accomplish His purposes with Abraham and Sarah.

When you listen to Satan's accusations, you will focus your attention on yourself and your sins; this will lead only to defeat and despair. But when you listen to the Holy Spirit's conviction, you will look by faith to Jesus Christ, your Advocate at the right hand of the Father. You will remember that He died for you and that God will not disown you, because you belong to Christ. It is because of the heavenly intercession of the Son of God that you and I can defeat Satan's accusations.

So Great a Salvation

Satan would love to blind us to our complete salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants us to get our eyes on our failures; Christ wants to get our eyes on Himself. Satan wants to remind us of our sins; Christ wants to remind us of our salvation in Christ. Over and over again the New Testament reminds us of the complete salvation that is ours in Christ. Yes, we fail, and yes, we sin; yet we are not to measure who we are in Christ by our failures but by the finished work of Christ. This truth is beautifully brought out by the Apostle Paul in Colossians, where we read, "Having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (2:14). This is a powerful word picture.

In the New Testament, the word translated as "certificate of debt" was widely known. Whenever a person would be convicted in a Roman court, a "certificate of debt" or bond, would be prepared. The scribe of the court would itemize and write upon parchment every crime for which the person had been convicted. This certificate meant that the prisoner owed Caesar a prescribed payment for those crimes. It would then be taken with the prisoner and nailed to the door of his prison cell. What an illustration the apostle Paul used to show how God has dealt with our sins! When Jesus hung on the cross twenty centuries ago, the "certificate of debt" of

“You have sinned and keep on sinning. You are weak, and God can have nothing more to do with you.’ This is the argument of Satan, and if we accept his accusations, we go down immediately. Thus accusation becomes one of the greatest and most effective of Satan’s weapons.”

Watchman Nee
(1903-1973)
from *The Normal Christian Life*



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Correspondence should be sent to:

BIBLE & LIFE Newsletter
c/o David Dunlap
3116 Gulfwind Drive
Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
(813) 996-1053

e-mail

daviddunlap@earthlink.net

web site

www.bibleandlife.org

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bible-Life/139555992799868>

every man who would ever live was nailed to the cross with Him. Our certificate of debt lists every time that we fall short of God's perfect standard in thought, word, or deed. Just as that certificate would have been nailed to the cell of the criminal, Jesus took our certificate of debt and nailed it to his cross. Why? Because out of love he assumed payment for all our debt.

According to Roman law, when a person was put in prison and the certificate of debt was nailed to the door, it would remain there until the sentence was carried out. Then they would take this certificate and write across it the word meaning "It is finished." The certificate would be given to the prisoner, and he could never be punished for those crimes again. Just before Jesus bowed His head and said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit," He gave a cry of victory. He cried from the cross, "It is finished"—one word in the Greek language, *Tetelestai*, literally meaning "paid in full" (John 19:30). Jesus took our certificate of debt and wrote across it in His own blood, "Paid in full."

Conclusion

Unconfessed sin in our lives is a foothold for Satan. He can use that sin as a basis for accusation. The longer he accuses, the greater that sin becomes in our own eyes. It becomes so big that it covers the face of God and hides His grace and love from us. We do not experience feelings of conviction that bring us back to God, but feelings of condemnation that convince us that we cannot go back to God. Guilt becomes a terrible weapon in Satan's hands, destroying our joy, our peace, and our fellowship with God. Our hope fades. We are swallowed up by despair. Then Satan's voice says to us, "Curse God and die!" Do not listen to the voice of the devil! Instead, listen to the voice of God. Turn to the Word of God and believe what God says. Rest assured that your Advocate in heaven is waiting to forgive you and restore you. To delay the acknowledgement and confession sin is only to give Satan a greater opportunity to damage your life and ministry.

Endnotes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, (MacMillan: New York, NY, 1962), p. 61