

Know Your Spiritual Enemy's Tactics #4

Daniel 10:13; John 10:28

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One of the most successful ways in which Satan leads us into temptation and into times of ineffectiveness and great discouragement is to suggest to us **doubts about** the sincerity of our faith, **doubts about** our struggles with sin, **doubts about** the love, justice, and faithfulness of God when we are going through times of suffering, heartache, and persecution, and **doubts about** the lack of joy, peace, and contentment in our lives.

Satan is called “the accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10). He is constantly employed in sowing the seeds of doubt and unbelief in our minds (as He did with Eve). He is not omniscient. He cannot see into our minds to know our thoughts, but he does have “scouting reports” from his demonic hosts as to our sins/weaknesses that come through our speech and our actions wherein we give expression to our own inward doubts and struggles. Our enemy is an expert at using our conscience against us. This becomes the battleground in warring against the temptations of the enemy to doubt/disbelieve God’s promise of everlasting life to us who trust alone in Christ alone.

God endowed all of us with a conscience that acts as an inward moral judge in either approving or accusing our thoughts, words, and deeds. Samuel Rutherford (that godly and learned Scottish minister of the Second Reformation) rightly observed, “The conscience is a tender piece, and either the best friend... or the saddest enemy” (*Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*, p. 22).

However, our conscience is not the supreme judge of our thoughts, words, and deeds. “God alone is lord of the conscience.” There is only one supreme lawgiver, namely, the Lord (**James 4:12**). Our conscience is only as reliable in what it approves or disapproves as the moral standard to which it appeals—whether to the unchangeable, infallible standard of God’s Word, or to the changeable, fallible standard of man’s word.

We should neither ignore our conscience lest it become calloused, nor worship our conscience lest it become a god. We must test our conscience by God’s Word. Our conscience can either be used by the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and to draw us to Christ and His mercy, or our conscience can be used by the devil to condemn us that we have sinned away the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Because some of us as Christians have struggled or do struggle with a condemning conscience or a doubting conscience as it relates to our salvation in Jesus Christ, we must recognize that the enemy will use this against us at every turn to lead us away from Christ, to discourage us, to rob us of our joy and peace in Jesus, and to lead us into times of hopelessness/despair. These temptations from the enemy do not reveal that we are not Christians, but reveal we need to know how to respond as Christians to these temptations. The main points are: (1) Examples of Temptations to Doubt Our Salvation in Christ and Responses; (2) Concluding Remarks.

I. Examples of Temptations to Doubt Our Salvation in Christ and Responses. Here are four representative examples.

A. **Satan tempts us with**, “Yes, Jesus will save those who trust in Him, but your faith is not real/sincere. Your doubts about your faith and assurance of salvation prove that your faith is not genuine.”

1. Satan often employs some part of the truth to mislead us, but then uses that truth to an evil end/conclusion (just as he quoted Scripture in tempting Christ to do what was contrary to God’s will).

2. There is a difference between a weak faith in our resting in Christ and no faith in resting in Christ at all. True faith is summarized by KAT (knowledge, assent/agreement, trust). True faith is not measured by its size or strength, but by its object in which it trusts—Christ (the faith of a mustard seed, Matthew 17:20). The question to be asked about true faith is not, “How much faith do you have in Christ?”, but rather, “Is your faith in Christ alone for your salvation?”

3. So this temptation to doubt the sincerity of our faith actually can become just another opportunity to remind ourselves that it is Jesus that saves not our faith that saves. Our faith is simply resting in who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for us in His life, death, and resurrection. When our assurance is attacked, our response should be not to look at our faith, but to look at Christ in His all-sufficiency and call to embrace Him as our justification, sanctification, and everlasting life (faith is like an eye). Assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith, but is the effect of faith in Christ and His promise.

4. As with all of these examples of temptations to doubt, the enemy will seek to take our eye of faith off of God's promise and to walk by feeling and by sight (John 5:24; Acts 16:31). Stand upon the unchangeable and infallible promise of God who cannot lie, rather than upon the father of lies—Satan. Memorize God's promises.

B. Satan tempts us with, "The struggles and relapses into the same sins contradict your claim to have saving faith. If you were a Christian you would have overcome that sin by now."

1. When we are born again (regenerated) by God's sovereign grace and power, we are made alive to God, whereas before we were dead to Him in our intellect, emotions, and will (Ephesians 2:1). We have been graciously granted faith in Christ, and the fruit of the Spirit (the spiritual DNA of Christ) has been implanted in us. All our sins have been forgiven, and Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to us by faith alone. We are justified and declared righteous in Christ once and for all. Before the judgment seat of God, we are legally as righteous as Christ Himself (which can never change because it does not depend upon us, but upon Christ—Jesus would have to change and become unrighteous before our righteous standing before God could change).

2. Though those great blessings are ours (now and for all eternity), God did not annihilate and destroy all sin within us. We continue to battle/war against the world, the flesh, and the devil as enemies against us. All of the saints in Scripture struggled with besetting sins (Samson, Solomon, Jonah, disciples of Christ, Paul in Romans 7:19 etc.). Of course, that does not excuse or justify our falling into the same sins, but it does explain why we do so. That is what the process of sanctification is all about—growing in putting off the old man in Adam and putting on the new man in Christ. Accounting ourselves dead with Christ and alive with Christ. Accounting that sin no longer has dominion over us (Romans 6:14).

3. How we respond to such failures is indicative of where our faith and love are. Do we remain in those failures, enjoying them, delighting in them, or do we hate and despise our falling and look to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus? Paul states that he hates the sin into which he fell (Romans 7:15). Why? Because he had sinned against God's love, mercy, and holiness. Are we grieved that we have grieved our loving Father, our gracious Savior, and our blessed Comforter, the Holy Spirit?

4. Those who are alive in Christ and whose faith is genuine will not continue in unrepentant sin (Romans 6:1-2). By looking to the mercy of God in Christ, we will arise from those failures, repent, and renew our love and obedience to Christ our Savior and King (Proverbs 24:16; Micah 7:8).

C. Satan tempts us with, "Look at all of the pain and suffering God has brought upon you. If He loved you, if He was just, and if He was faithful to you, He would not put you into this raging storm that you are facing. If you were His dear child, He would not allow these great trials to overwhelm you. These are His judgments because you are not His child."

1. Let us be clear that God does not exempt His dear children from the suffering, trials, heartaches, and persecution of this world. To the contrary, the Lord chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:5-7). He is teaching us in the School of Christ to look to Him, to trust Him, to draw near to Him, to take up His Word and His promises, and to long for the glory of heaven when all of these trials will be past.

2. The devil loves to hit us with such a temptation especially when we are suffering in some way—when our resistance to such temptations is the weakest and when we are the most vulnerable.

3. Consider how our loving and gracious Father dealt with His dear beloved children throughout Scripture: Job (all his possessions, children, and health were taken from him), Joseph (he was sold

into slavery and slandered and thrown into prison); Jonah (he was swallowed by a great fish); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (they were cast into a fiery furnace), Daniel (he was thrown into a lions' den), the disciples (they feared death in the violent storm), John the Baptist (he was beheaded by Herod), Paul (he was given the thorn in the flesh), and Jesus (He suffered the wrath of man and of God). None of these were rejected, abandoned, cast away, but were loved and taught to persevere in trusting in the Lord regardless of what they experienced. When we exit from those great trials, we look back and see the Lord was with us and never failed us. He was ever faithful.

D. **Satan tempts us with**, "You have no joy, peace, or comfort. These are graces God gives to His saints. You cannot be saved."

1. Like the graces of faith, repentance, love, and holiness, so likewise joy, peace, and comfort are graces from the Lord Jesus that are implanted in our souls at regeneration. However, these graces are not all growing at the same rate or all present at the same time in every trial, temptation, affliction, or failure that we face. It is generally the case that we are tempted by the enemy to ignore the many times those graces have been evident in the past—to pass over those occasions and only focus on what we are presently experiencing (a selective memory).

2. At such times, it is important to pause and reflect on God's work of grace in our lives over the long run, to be thankful and to rejoice in Christ's redemptive benefits evident in our lives. It is remembering with great gratitude to God for His work in our life that brings forth joy, peace, and comfort (Psalm 105:5). Satan wants us to forget. God calls us to remember mighty evidences of His grace in our life.

3. Though my comfort seems gone, the God of all comfort abides with me now and for all eternity (2 Corinthians 1:3; Job 19:25).

II. **Concluding Remarks.**

A. Always carry with you those precious promises that God will cause all of His saints perseverance in faith and will uphold you through all temptations and trials (John 6:39; John 10:28). Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ (Romans 8:38-39).

B. Satan will tempt you to look only at the sin that you have committed. The Holy Spirit will bring you to see the sin you have committed as grievous, but will always turn you to God's mercy in Jesus Christ, to repent of your sin, to rejoice in God's loving forgiveness, and to renew your obedience to walk in His commandments. Satan is the Accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). The Holy Spirit is the Comforter of the brethren (John 14:16).

C. Don't debate with the devil when you are struggling with his accusations. He has thousands of years of experience in leading Christians into discouragement/despair. Jesus did not do so—neither should we, "It is written."

D. When you fall, arise quickly, not slowly. You are more vulnerable to greater attacks when you remain down under doubt.

E. When the enemy brings doubt to your mind, exchange that temptation with something for which you are thankful from the Lord. Remember the mercies of the Lord. Don't flirt with the temptation. Don't be idle. Be active and diligent in good work and activity.

F. Flee to Christ. Always flee to Him. Assurance is nurtured in our communion with Christ, not distance from Him. Let Him answer as your Advocate all of the accusations brought against you by the devil. Let the devil take the accusation up with Jesus (1 John 2:1; Romans 8:33-34).

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