**New Hope Global Sermon- Influenced by Secularism?**

**Introduction:**

In the book of Deuteronomy God tells the Israelites: “Do not make for yourselves an idol. . .like any animal. . .Burn their idols in the fire. . .None of these idols shall be found in your hands” (Deut. 4:16,17, 7:5, 13:17). The reasons behind these commands were two-fold: God knew the idols would become substitutes for Israel’s worship and obedience to God. And God knew the enslaving power of evil behind the idols. Don McCurry comments in his book, *Tales That Teach,* “Interesting verses aren’t they? The problem for a secular humanist is this: He or she doesn’t believe these fascinating art forms (that are actual idols in various countries) are anything more than the harmless creations of human hands. Unfortunately, secular humanists don’t believe there is a spiritual world either, with a real God, angels, Satan and demons. Much less do they believe these human artifacts, even though dedicated to pagan gods, can be invested with evil powers. Experiences teach us otherwise” (Don McCurry, *Tales that Teach, Ministry to Muslims, 2009, p. 386-7).* There are active forces of evil in the world whose express purpose is to “steal, kill and destroy” Christians (Jn.10:10).

He goes on to share his experience that proves the power of these forces in the unseen world:

Mary Jo and I were privileged to be the paying guests at the home of a single mother in Costa Rica. She happened to teach history at the University of Costa Rica…During summer vacation time she [would visit] an exotic country that came up in her course on world history. The summer before we came to live with her, she and her son chose to visit India.

After her return home, her son, who had been such a healthy little five-year-old, was now a chronically sick six-year-old. The doctors tried everything under the sun to find out what was wrong but all of their diagnostic techniques had not yielded a clue. It was now a year later and the mom was getting more and more depressed. This was her one and only child. She asked us to pray for her boy. We did but in the prayer we also asked the Lord to show us the cause of this chronic illness. Nothing happened until. . .

One day it suddenly dawned on me that every time we entered Bejani’s living room, our eyes were drawn repeatedly to the shiny elephant on her central mantelpiece. It sparkled with a patina of uncountable tiny mirrors. It seemed to draw every eye to itself. Having been to India several times (he and his wife Mary Jo were missionaries in Pakistan) and being somewhat aware of the pantheon of gods they worship there, I began to suspect something. So I asked, “Bejani, tell me about that elephant on the mantelpiece.” “Oh, I bought it in India,” she replied. Then I asked her if she could remember the shop where she bought it. Without a moment’s hesitation, she responded, “How could I ever forget it?. . .On either side of the front entranceway, there were two gigantic carvings of elephants at least eight feet high. And there was one over the doorway too.” “Ganesh, Ganesh, “I cried out., “You have brought an idol representing the Hindu elephant god, Ganesh, into your home!”

Because this discussion has to do with things in the unseen world, there is no way to prove the existence of such phenomena as the connection between bringing an idol of a pagan god into your home and human sickness. In such cases, you have to let the results speak for themselves. To be sure, there are assumptions involved in dealing with this kind of situation. In this case, the assumption was that this elephant plastered with tiny bits of mirrors had been devoted to the Hindu elephant god, Ganesh. In other words, a spirit or spirits had been invited to attach itself to this idol, thus imbuing it with some kind of ‘power’. Since the Living God, our real God, has forbidden this kind of activity, that power is not from Him; it is from the enemy, in other words, a harmful power.

After explaining these things to Bejani, I asked is she was willing to destroy this thing and, because she was a believer, to command any spirit or spirits attached to this thing to depart in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and not come back. She agreed and immediately took it outside and smashed it to smithereens and commanded any spirits attached to it ‘to depart in Jesus’ name’ and not come back. . .

And her son? He became well from that moment on (McCurry, Ibid, pp. 385-387).

McCurry’s experience is a story about the realities of the active power of evil in that world. Secularists and scientific materialists deny those realities. However, their thinking is directly opposed to the truths in the Bible in both the Old and New Testament. Jesus Himself said He was “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn.14:6). If we ARE His disciples and believe He is the truth, then we need to accept what He says about the reality of Satan:

42Jesus told them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. 43Why can’t you understand what I am saying? It’s because you can’t even hear me! 44For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (Jn.8:42-44).



**The Father of Lies**

C.S. Lewis wrote a masterful book called *Screwtape Letters* describing these lying strategies of Satan as they affect believers. In the preface he cautions Christians with these words: “Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar.” (C.S.Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Harper One, first written in 1942, restored in 1996, p,1x). Lewis demonstrates that throughout the book as he describes Satan’s strategies to Wormwood, the demon in charge of a newly converted Christian young adult:

[First, in terms of the new Christian recognizing the forces of evil:] “I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves” (p.31).

Satan’s effort to keep people from recognizing his existence is what the Bible refers to as “blinding the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor.4:4).

[Second, in the focus of evil directing a person’s thoughts:] “Keep his mind on the inner life. He thinks his conversion is something inside him and his attention is therefore chiefly turned at present to the states of his own mind – or rather to the expurgated version of them which is all you should allow him to see. . . Aggravate that most useful human characteristic, the horror and neglect of the obvious. You must bring him to a condition in which he can practice self-examination for an hour without discovering any of those facts about himself which are perfectly clear to anyone who has ever lived in the same house with him or worked in the same office (Lewis, p. 12).

“Keep his mind on.. . .all you should allow him to see. . . bring him to a condition” – all action verbs that reveal the forces of evil working to control people’s minds.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul says,

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4For the weapons of our warfare *are* not

carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Derek Prince, in his book *Spiritual Warfare* notes: “It is tremendously important that we understand where the battle is taking place. ..Paul uses various words. . .imaginations, reasonings, speculations, arguments, knowledge and thought. Notice that every one of those words refers to the same particular realm, the realm of the mind. . .Satan is waging an all out war to captivate the minds of the human race. He is building strongholds and fortresses in their minds. . . These strongholds and fortresses resist the truth of the gospel and the Word of God” (Derek Prince, *Spiritual Warfare*, Whitaker House, 1987, p. 32-33) . They are present in believers as well as unbelievers.

Wesley Duewel pinpoints the problem in his book *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*:

 The New English Bible translates James 4:7 ‘stand up to the devil and he will turn

 and run’. . .The Greek literally says oppose. This is a command. You do not defeat

 Satan by passively ‘looking to the Lord.’ . . .[The command to take a stand against Satan, to

 resist and oppose him, is as much a command as the command to witness or to preach

 the gospel. Our world is a battleground. . .Calvary was planned by God not only to deliver

 us from our sins but to empower us so that we can defeat Satan. God the Son defeated

Satan at Calvary and depends on us now to enforce His victory by prayer warfare]”

(Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Francis Asbury Press, 190, p. 242).

My fear is that too many Christians have allowed secular thinking to influence their own belief systems so they don’t take these matters seriously. Lewis, Prince, Duewel, the New Testament authors, and countless other Christian writers today acknowledge that the warfare against Christians is primarily a battle in the mind. I agree with Peter Wagner’s concern: “I do hope and pray that we will quickly learn how to use our spiritual weapons more effectively in putting a stop to the blatant and all-to-successful attacks of the devil” (Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield,* Chosen Books, updated and revised 2014, p. 64).

Therefore, the lying strategies of Satan which create strongholds in people’s minds is the theme in the sermon this week. It follows the focus of the precious weeks when I said that fervent intercession is really spiritual warfare. Our emphasis today is how to recognize and resist the lies that Satan influences us to believe.

There is a surprising naiveite or ignorance among Christians concerning the reality of Satan and his tactics. Paul gives instructions to the new Corinthian believers so that “Satan may not outwit us for we are not unaware of his schemes.” (2. Cor.2:11). Yet, many Christians in the West seem to be unaware of this powerful foe who is against God and all God’s people and purposes in the world. We can’t resist an enemy if we don’t understand who the enemy is and what the enemy’s purposes are. We need to examine our own hearts and see if we have succumbed to the secular view that discredits the unseen world. Then we need to confess to Jesus that we have disregarded His clear teachings about Satan and not had faith in the truth He teaches. Jesus sent believers the Spirit of Truth to help us understand the unseen world and then convict us of our sin in minimizing it. The Spirit also helps Christians come to repentance and gives us the empowerment to align our own thinking with God’s on these issues. There are five areas to consider.

**Five specific lies that Christians fall prey to**

1. We need to recognize that Satan is an accuser and tries to undermine our relationship with God (Rev. 12:10).

Recently, a dear Christian friend was doubting her good standing with the Lord -which made her question her right to become a powerful prayer intercessor. As she read *Prayer Shield* she said:

“I downloaded the book on Saturday and read the intro and first chapter. The line that struck me and caused me to fear is just the statement about having "the proper standing before God":

"Intercession is the act of pleading by one who in God's sight has a right to do so in order to obtain mercy of one in need" ... a legitimate intercessor must be one who has God's endorsement and approval. And at some point, I thought, "Why am I reading this book? I don't want to be seeking to have my prayers answered if my relationship with God is not close."

But today when I looked at those portions, I was reminded that my standing with God is based on what Christ has done for me. So I won't be afraid to learn how to become an intercessor. I'll just keep reminding myself of the freedom that I have in Christ to go before his throne of grace.

The Spirit helped her see the lie in her fear that she did not have a sufficient relationship with God. That perception may have been unconsciously based on a need to be perfect, but it contradicted the truth that as a Christian, Jesus gave her His own righteousness and that made her able to come boldly into the throne room of grace. God saw her covered with the breastplate of His righteousness (Eph.6:14). When the Spirit reminded her of her standing before God in Christ, she resisted the lie of the enemy in her mind and could press on to the calling of God on her life.

2. Satan will also accuse us of past sins which we have either confessed and thus been forgiven and cleansed by God, or failures we have taken to God and for which we received His comfort and restoration. Satan is lying when he insinuates that these sins or failures make God turn away from us. That creates a mentality of shame. But it can be false shame. It is false when we have already dealt with God in these areas and He has put them behind Him. We can be free from that inner condemnation. We must resist those accusations with the Blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony that uses Scripture like I Cor.6:9-11, which lists all our prior sins and then adds “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.” Or Romans 5-8 which ends “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:1). One of Satan’s strategies is focused on making the believer doubt their own worth to God, their salvation and God’s leading them to their place or calling in the world.

3.Other attacks center on distorting the Christian’s understanding of God. His bottom line is that God cannot be trusted.

When Satan is trying to deceive a person, like he did for Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden, he took a command of God but cast dispersion on the character of God in giving that command. For Eve he said God was withholding from her an ability to be wise, as He is. That was an appeal to her pride but also a distortion of why God gave the command – i.e,. so that they would not live forever. Similarly, Satan can make us believe that God requires perfection and is always condemning us because we fail to meet that goal. Or that God cannot possibly be good when He allows suffering and the blatant evils of slavery, human trafficking, wars, tribal violence, and the various diseases that ravage countries. Or that God is aloof or has abandoned us when our prayers are not answered after we plead repeatedly for His intervention in various circumstances, We can even harbor the thought that God is not answering because we are not worthy of making such requests. To counter these negatives thoughts, you can claim Jesus’ promises: “I will be with you always till the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20), “I will never leave or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5), and “Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Rom.8:17-19).

All these distortions are directly contradictory to the Biblical understanding of God. Thus, one way to discover the lies Satan puts in our minds is to compare them with the revelations of God in the Bible.

4. However, we know from Scripture that Satan can quote scripture so we have to be sure that the way the interpretation of a certain scripture appears in our minds is faithful to the context and to the whole revelation of God. For example, in Christ’s temptations, Satan quoted various scriptures in tempting our Lord, but the intent behind each quote violated God’s express revelations in other parts of the Bible. In Christ’s temptations Satan tried to get Jesus to shortcut His calling as the sacrificial Lamb by creating a scenario where Jesus would receive world acclaim – once He had submitted to Satan!

5. Satan also brings a spirit of oppression or heaviness to Christians to immobilize us and take our focus off the Lord. In those times, you can use Isa. 61:3, which Jesus also quoted about Himself – claiming that the Messiah would replace the spirit of despair/ heaviness/ hopeless/ depression with His own mantle of Praise. I have also used Psalm 40 to counter the lies Satan brings when we feel stuck in a “miry pit” (v.1). The reality of the negative emotions is real but God is the One who lifts us up from that pit (which we can’t get out of), sets our feet upon a rock, establishing us in the new way to walk and puts a new song of praise in our mouths (Ps. 40:1-3).

Jesus fought off Satan’s attacks with the scripture and we must do this too.

Beloved, God has given us the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth so we can discern what comes from the evil one and what comes from God. Ask God for the discernment to be able to tell the difference. And ask others who walk closely with the Lord and know the Scriptures to check if there are evil distortions about God or you in the voices you are listening to.

Satan is a liar, the father of lies. But Jesus defeated all Satan’s forces of evil at the cross and rose triumphing over them (Col.2:15). We are to go forward in Christ’s victory, beloved. God is our deliverer, our Shepherd, the Captain of the armies of heaven, the Lord of the universe, our heavenly Parent and the One who has poured out his love for us on the cross so He can now pour that love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom.5:5). The promise of the Holy Spirit in believers (according to I John 4:4) is: “The one in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” The one in the world is Satan, whom Jesus called “the prince of this world” (Jn. 12:31). This “prince” is a Liar who has been defeated by the Spirit of truth. The strongholds we may have tolerated as Satan’s lies take root in us can be demolished that the Spirit’s power. God has already won that victory. Now it is our job to “resist the devil” (Jam. 4:7) and live in God’s freedom and truth. (2 Cor.10:3-5). Hallelujah! Amen.

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