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I Talk Back to the Devil!

"The devil makes it his business to keep Christians in bondage, bound and gagged, actually imprisoned in their own grave clothes!"

Why doesn't the old devil, Satan, give up and bow out of the picture when a person becomes a believing Christian?

Although he is a dark and sinister foe dedicated to the damnation of humans, I think he knows that it is no use trying to damn a forgiven and justified child of God who is in the Lord's hands.

So, it becomes the devil's business to keep the Christian's spirit imprisoned. He knows that the believing and justified Christian has been raised up out of the grave of his sins and trespasses. From that point on, Satan works that much harder to keep us bound and gagged, actually imprisoned in our own grave clothes.

He knows that if we continue in this kind of bondage, we will never be able to claim our rightful spiritual heritage. He knows also that while we continue bound in this kind of enslavement, we are not much better off than when we were spiritually dead.

This is one reason why the Christians in today's churches are behaving like a flock of frightened sheep—so intimidated by the devil that we can't even say "Amen"!

I admit that occasionally you find a few who are just childishly happy about everything, but that is not what I mean. Often these are just like children playing in the marketplaces, having never been seriously engaged in the conflict on the spiritual battlefield.

Show me an individual or a congregation committed to spiritual progress with the Lord, interested in what the Bible teaches about spiritual perfection and victory, and I will show you where there is strong and immediate defiance by the devil!

Satan Loves to Intimidate

Satan has been in this business of intimidating and silencing and oppressing the people of God for a long, long time.

The armies of Israel experienced this kind of fright in the valley of Elah when Goliath and the Philistines were camped on the opposite mountain. King Saul was leading Israel, but he was sour, fearful, intimidated because of Goliath, that giant

of a man who daily shouted his taunts, "I defy the armies of Israel this day!" (1 Samuel 17:10). So the army cowered in fear.

But a little fellow by the name of David came along, and he was in right fellowship with the Lord. We are told that the spirit of the Lord came upon David, who said to the Israelites, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:32).

This was the first word of encouragement to come to these ranks of soldiers who had been able only to gaze in fascinated fear at that great giant who taunted them daily. David was confident and serene because he knew and trusted the Source of all strength! The recorded result was one of the great, miraculous "turnarounds" of history: David and his sling disposing of Goliath in a way that brought glory to the God of Israel as well as victory to the armies of Israel.

I am sure that it is not glorifying to our God that Christians should be so intimidated and silenced in our day. It was Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, who came down and took our human body for Himself. He was a man, born of a woman, a man wearing our own nature—but He was also God!

He went to the cross, and they sacrificed Him there. The Father, God Almighty, accepted His sacrifice as the one, last, final fulfillment and consummation of all the sacrifices ever made on Jewish altars. After He had been dead three days, He came forth—raised from the dead and out of

the grave. After a few days He ascended as Victor over all the forces of death and hell and sat down amid the acclamations of the heavenly hosts!

There He sits at God's right hand—a living man, our representative and advocate and great High Priest. Believing this, we ought to be the most fearless, the most relaxed, the happiest and most God-assured people in the whole world!

But Satan is an old dragon who defies us to this hour. He is saying to Christians, "I defy you—what can you do about it?"

We Must Get Free!

I think we had better get free! We must face up to the issues and attitudes and doubts which constitute our fears, that keep us from being happy and victorious Christians with the true liberty of the children of God. We seem to quake about many things.

In the first place, are you still afraid of your past sins? God knows that sin is a terrible thing—and the devil knows it too. So he follows us around, and as long as we will permit it, he will taunt us about our past sins.

As for myself, I have learned to talk back to him on this score. I say, "Yes, Devil, sin is terrible—but I remind you that I got it from you! And I remind you, Devil, that everything good—forgiveness and cleansing and blessing—everything that is good I have freely received from Jesus Christ!"

Everything that is bad and that is against me, I got from the devil—so why should he have the

effrontery and the brass to argue with me about it? Yet he will do it because he is the devil, and he is committed to keeping God's children shut up in a little cage, their wings clipped so that they can never fly!

In our churches we often sing, "Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears." But nothing happens, and we keep our fears. Why do we claim on one hand that our sins are gone and on the other act just as though they are not gone?

Brethren, we have been declared "not guilty!" by the highest court in all the universe. Still there are honest Christians, earnestly seeking the face of God, who cannot seem to break loose and find real freedom. The grave clothes trip them up every time they try to move on a little faster. Satan uses their past sins to terrify them.

Now on the basis of grace as taught in the Word of God, when God forgives a man, He trusts him as though he had never sinned. God did not have mental reservations about any of us when we became His children by faith. When God forgives a man, He doesn't think, "I will have to watch this fellow because he has a bad record." No, He starts with him again as though he had just been created and as if there had been no past at all! That is the basis of our Christian assurance—and God wants us to be happy in it.

Satan Magnifies Memories

Next, are you allowing Satan to magnify the memories of your spiritual failures? He will al-

ways keep them before you unless you take your stand and move up in faith.

The devil will whisper, "You didn't get very far along toward the deeper life, did you?"

He will say, "You made a big 'to-do' about wanting to be filled with the Spirit, and you really flopped, didn't you?"

He will taunt you with the fact that you may have stumbled in the faith—and perhaps more than once! The devil wants you to live in a state of discouraged chagrin and remorse.

Remember, the Bible does not teach that if a man falls down, he can never rise again. The fact that he falls is not the most important thing—but rather that he is forgiven and allows God to lift him up!

Perhaps you have read of the saintly Fletcher, whose holy life became so recognized that he was called "the seraphic Fletcher." His testimony reveals that he stumbled and miserably failed God seven times. But after the seventh failure, he went to a room and did not come out until he was able to rest his case completely in the strength of God's hands. He came out of the room saying, "Dear Lord, I believe that I am delivered from the bondage of my sin. If you will keep me and help me, I will never cease telling the world what you can do for a man!" For the rest of his life, Fletcher exhibited to the world God's power to bless and to keep His transformed children on earth.

If our failures are going to hinder us forever, we might just as well never have taken the first

step. But God knew all about us, and He still loved us and desired His eternal best for us.

God Knows Humans

The Bible tells us often that God knows humans better than they know themselves—He doesn't have to wait for the information to come from the Accuser, the devil. God has said,

I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.

Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it. (Isaiah 48:8-11)

God does have a stake in each of us—and it is for His own sake that He will lift us up. He is not going to bless us for our own sake—He is going to bless us for Jesus' sake and for the sake of His own name!

If you think that there is anyone in the world so good that God could do something for that person's sake, you don't know sin; and if you think there is anything that God will not do for you for His sake and for His name, you don't know God!

If you have failed, remember that you are not responsible to men in this regard. You stand responsible before your heavenly Father and Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. Let us be encouraged by this good news!

In the third place, some are fearful that they will lose their reputation as sober and conservative and traditional Christians. In other words, they have never been willing to be a fool for Jesus' sake!

It is amazing that genuine Christians are not willing to stand up wherever they are and give a good word for the Lord. There are great political ideologies sweeping the world now whose members will make double-eyed, long-eared donkeys of themselves for the sake of the party and the cause. There are religious sects whose witnesses are willing to go to jail, to be pushed around, to be lampooned for the sake of a miserable, twisted doctrine! But in our Christian ranks, we prefer to be respectable and smooth, and we have a reputation for being very solemn Christian believers.

I can only conclude from my experience that many solemn, professing Christians will never make any spiritual progress and will never really be happy in the Lord until God finds some way to shake them out of their deadly respectability!

Charles G. Finney, the great American evangelist, knew this experience of becoming God's man and God's mouthpiece in such a way and with such unusual blessing and results that many just stood as critics and tried to frown him down.

Have to Lose Reputations

So it has been with all of God's saints who have pleased Him and praised Him through the centuries. At some time in their witness and expression of the living Christ, they have had to lose their reputations among those who have been traditionally pious and somber, dogmatic and cautious.

This is still happening in our day, and with glorious results.

A young man who is director of one of our American Bible conferences has given me his testimony of great and radical things that the Lord has done for him in recent months.

I realize now that in my service for God I was one of the most self-assured, conceited and horrid young fellows you could ever meet," he told me frankly. "I could raise money, I could put on a great program, and I figured I was a great success in the Lord's work.

But recently on a trip to Wales, I had the opportunity of talking to some older folks who remembered Evan Roberts and the great Welsh revival. They told me about the true working of the Holy Spirit in Christian renewal and revival—and I didn't really know what they were talking about.

Somehow, and they did not realize it, it was just as though they were burying me under a great load of crushing bricks, and God spoke to me about my own great spiritual lack.

He told me that he made his way to the little cottage where he was staying and got down on his knees and began to sweat it out before God.

Do you know what this was? It was the act of dying! It was the end of self. That man died to reputation, ability, presumption, success, conceit, personality—all of that stuff!

He said to me, “Mr. Tozer, I was filled with the Holy Spirit, and my whole life has been transformed. Now I only want this cheated and betrayed generation to see the glory of God once more.”

I said to him then, “Brother, do you realize that if you carry through with this message and this blessing, that you will lose some of your best fundamentalist friends? You will be described as having gone off your rocker!”

“I am not worried anymore about my reputation,” he replied. “I am perfectly willing because I am going to let the Lord have His way in the whole operation!”

The interesting thing is that he hasn’t had to switch or change his doctrines around at all—he just found out that he needed the fire of God on his doctrine, and he got it!

Fear of Fanaticism

Also related to reputation is the fear of many Christians that they will be considered fanatical or extreme for their Christian faith. I think it is ironic that the devil gives the world all of its extremists in every realm—entertainment, politics, society, education, anarchy, intrigue—you name

it! Yet it is the same devil that frightens believers about the great danger of becoming “extreme.”

I passed an auditorium recently where one of the young crowd of singing stars was appearing. Police were having great trouble with the crowds, and in the erotic fury of that concert, girls began to tear off their clothes; many were weeping and screaming. Those who had fainted were being carried out.

It is the same devil, but he uses different tactics in dealing with Christians. Should a Christian get blessed and say “Amen,” the devil quickly intervenes and whispers, “Don’t be a fanatic—you ought to stay quiet and stable in the faith!”

Oh, what a devil the devil is! He frightens us first and then sells us a bill of goods about caution, caution, caution in the church.

Some Christians also are greatly awed by the fear of ostracism. The devil says to them, “Be careful about religion—you will be lonely. You will have to go it alone!”

I have heard one of our preachers tell about the experience he had years ago in coming to a decision concerning the claims of Christ on his life. It was at the close of a service, and he was standing with the rest of the congregation while an invitation was being given to come forward in submission to the will of God. There was a struggle going on in his own soul, and he knew that the Spirit of God was pressing him to make the decision to sell out completely and to become a real Christian in commitment to the Lord.

But the devil knows how to join in these arguments, and he whispered, “Charlie, you must be careful at this point. You know how easy it would be to break up your marriage and break up your home. You know how staid and straitlaced and conservative your wife is about religion. Don’t do anything that would break up your home, Charlie!”

But the Spirit of God persisted, and Charlie found himself answering the call. He went forward and knelt at the altar for heartsearching and prayer.

Suddenly he thought he heard someone weeping at his side. Then he was sure that it sounded like his wife. Turning, he found that it was his wife, for she had been just a few feet behind him when he made his way to the altar. Together they made their commitment to Christ and to His service.

For a long time, you see, Satan had been telling Charlie that his wife would never be willing to yield to joyful Christian dedication. But the devil is a liar and the father of lies! (see John 8:44). He never tells the truth unless he can use it to whip you and embarrass you—unless he can use it in his attempts to ruin you and destroy you!

Fear of Holy Enthusiasm

There also seems to be a chilling fear of holy enthusiasm among the people of God. We try to tell how happy we are—but we remain so well-controlled that there are very few waves of glory experienced in our midst.

Some of you go to the ball game, and you come back whispering because you are hoarse from shouting and cheering. But no one in our day ever goes home from church with a voice hoarse from shouts brought about by a manifestation of the glory of God among us.

Actually our apathy about praise in worship is like an inward chill in our beings. We are under a shadow, and we are still wearing the grave clothes. You can sense this in much of our singing in the contemporary church. Perhaps you will agree that in most cases it is a kind of plodding along, without the inward life of blessing and victory and resurrection joy and overcoming in Jesus' name.

Why is this? It is largely because we are looking at what we are, rather than responding to who Jesus Christ is! We have often failed and have not been overcomers because our trying and striving have been in our own strength. That leaves us very little to sing about!

Dr. A.B. Simpson wrote:

Fainting soldier of the Lord,
Hear His sweet, inspiring word;
"I have conquered all thy foes,
I have suffered all thy woes.
Struggling soldier, trust in Me,
I have overcome for thee!"

This has to be the secret of our praise and enthusiasm—Jesus Christ is our Overcomer! In our

own strength we cannot overcome anyone or anything.

Fear not though thy foes be strong,
Fear not though the strife be long;
Trust thy glorious Captain's power,
Watch with Him one little hour.
Hear Him calling, "Follow Me,
I have overcome for thee!"

Brethren, human activity and human sweat and tears work not the victory of Christ! It took the sweat and tears and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It took the painful dying and the victorious resurrection and ascension to bring us the victory!

We Must Trust

It is for us to trust, to trust wholly in the Lord Jesus. This is the only way in which we can conquer fear and live in blessed victory.

I have had times in my life and ministry when the burdens and the pressures seemed to be too much. Sometimes physical weariness adds to our problems and our temptation to give in to discouragement and doubt. At these times it seems that even in prayer it is impossible to rise above the load. More than once, by faith that seemed to have been imparted directly from heaven, the Lord has enabled me to claim all that I needed for body, soul and spirit. On my knees I have been given freedom and strength to pray, "Now, Lord,

I have had enough of this—I refuse to take any more of this heaviness and oppression! This does not come from God—this comes from my enemy, the devil! Lord, in Jesus' name, I will not take it any longer—through Jesus Christ I am victor!" At these times, great burdens have just melted and rolled away all at once!

Brethren, God never meant for us to be kicked around like a football. He wants us to be humble and let Him do the chastening when necessary. But when the devil starts tampering with you, dare to resist him!

I stand for believing in God and defying the devil—and our God loves that kind of courage among His people.

If you are still wrapped in grave clothes and great fears lie upon you, it is time for you to dare to rise and in sweet faith in the risen Jesus Christ declare: "I will not take this any longer. I am a child of God—why should I go mourning all the day?"

Will God answer?

"All right, My child," He will answer as the burden rolls away, "I have waited long to hear you say that. Jesus is Victor and in Him you overcome!"