

April 2018

Greetings Brethren,

We recently began a new year according to God's calendar and are, or soon will be, witnessing the annual cycle of renewal that God designed within His physical creation on Earth. Vegetation will be sprouting, and across the spectrum of the animal kingdom babies will be born. New life is evident. The beauty and complexity of His physical creation is awe-inspiring and one more manifestation of His glory. We too are looking forward to new life, but one that is of the Spirit. We recently observed the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread which began the annual cycle of God's Holy Days depicting His Master Plan of adding members to the God Family. For those that overcome and qualify, new life in the Spirit will be attained.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52).

### **We Are Fighting a Spiritual Battle**

Those who qualify will be changed from mortal to immortal. From physical to Spirit. From man to God. The purpose for our physical lives will have been fulfilled. Just as the sapling sprouts and attempts to grow to maturity, we too are endeavoring to grow to maturity. The sapling is buffeted by winds, heat, drought and other conditions that will either cause it to wither and die, or to grow stronger, deeper roots that enable it to continue growing. And like the sapling, we are buffeted by various conditions. But, a significant problem for us is that often we do not see all the conditions that can cause us to deviate from our objective of personal mastery and overcoming. Those blind spots in our vision and understanding can negatively affect us.

One potential blind spot is the recognition of demonic activity. Not only does demonic activity exist, but it does affect every one that is called of God. Yes, we do see, or are more aware of, demonic activity in the world. Frequently the news reports a killing spree took place and the perpetrator explained how the voices in his head told him what to do. We hear about the resurgence of witchcraft and the "magical arts" by those looking for a religious alternative. We are more aware of the outward manifestation of Satan's influence on this world and the chaos and confusion it causes.

How does this demonic activity, or those things perpetrated by Satan and his cohorts, affect you? Do you even recognize that it directly affects you? And, what do you need to be aware of in your fight against it? As we expand on this topic, there are four significant points to remember.

1. Satan is roaming the earth seeking those whom he can destroy.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

We are admonished to be alert and watchful to avoid danger because that danger is real, and it is directed at us. Satan is likened to a roaring lion, which typifies a powerful, ravaging animal. He is seeking those whom he can destroy because destruction, or loss of eternal life, is possible. Simply being called does not guarantee eternal life.

2. Satan is an accuser of the brethren.

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night (Revelation 12:10).

While Satan has access to God's throne he will continue to malign and castigate the brethren endlessly. Have you read that verse and primarily thought of the lies Satan is spewing and what he is actually saying? There may be some direct, outright lies told, but frequently he is shading the truth with a mixture of truth and error. He will take something out of context to make what you are doing correctly, appear incorrect. He will ascribe motive to your actions and thoughts that are wrong. An example could be: "Yes, he observed Pentecost on Monday, but he doesn't really believe it is on Monday. He really thinks it is Sunday, and deep down he wants to observe it on Sunday. He doesn't want to obey your laws." This is an illustration of how devious and subtle Satan is, and something we must remember as we learn to recognize his influence and to resist it.

Before you focus on the techniques Satan may use, remember this: Not only are false accusations being made day and night, but they are deliberate, thoughtful and levied directly against the brethren. Which means what? If you are called, then these false accusations are primarily about you. Out of the billions of people alive, you are his primary target. That is a sobering thought.

3. Satan, or one of his cohorts, is constantly playing "mind games." He does not appear physically in the stereotypical red suit with horns and a pitchfork, and pose that kind of physical, tangible danger. He primarily attacks and influences us through thoughts and emotions.

4. The faithful must be able to differentiate between the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1–6).

### **Who Is Satan and What Are His Objectives?**

Lucifer was created a mighty and glorious angel. He was perfect in his ways when God created him and was full of beauty and knowledge. God made Lucifer ruler over the earth where millions of angels under his charge were responsible for executing all of God's laws and rules. But at some point in time, wrong thoughts entered into Lucifer's mind and eventually he attempted to take God's place as ruler of the universe.

Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee (Ezekiel 28:14–15).

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High (Isaiah 14:13–14).

Lucifer, and approximately one third of the angels, attacked God's throne in an attempted coup, but were utterly defeated. Lucifer's sin of rebellion against God turned him into a devil. His name was changed to Satan, which means enemy, and the rebellious angels who followed Lucifer were from then on called demons. Satan and these demons hate the Truth of God and will do anything to destroy it. They also want to destroy the chance for every human to inherit eternal life and become a member of the God Family. One of Satan's primary objectives now, therefore, is to destroy the called of God. He will use any tactic in an attempt to destroy you spiritually and to prevent you from becoming a member of the God Family.

### **How Does He Accomplish His Work?**

Satan and the demons who follow him are spirit, and as such are invisible to man. Although they are unseen, their influence is powerful, and they must be resisted. The entire world has been deceived, and all aspects of society are under the influence of Satan's deception.

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12:9).

One danger we face is the desire to be a part of this world, or to accept the deceived ways of thinking the world has adopted. That is partly why we are admonished not to be partakers of, or accept the philosophies of, this world.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues (Revelation 18:4).

This deception covers five broad categories of society: economic, political, social, military and education, which includes religion. The people of the world are deceived and accept a false system. But what about those who understand and follow the Truth? If their desire is to reject the ways of this world and to follow God's Truth, what else needs to be considered? What other forms of influence are at work?

Even though Satan has influenced the world with a false system, and a system that is anti-God, his primary method of attacking the called of God is much subtler. He will influence thoughts and emotions. At first that may not seem too significant, but its effects can be disastrous.

## Israel Teaches Us a Lesson

Israel was a nation blessed with the perfect laws of God. They were not only given the framework for blessings and happiness, but they witnessed the direct intervention of God on their behalf. They were a civilized and intelligent people. Most likely their intellectual ability and moral character were superior to ours today. In short, they were a competent group of people. Even still, they turned to demonism.

They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not (Deuteronomy 32:16–17).

Demonism crept into the church in the wilderness. Israel did not reject God outright, but they were subtly influenced to make changes and additions to God's perfect laws. Add a little bit here. Modify a little bit there. Keep the foundational laws, just modify to some degree to make it "better" or more reflective of the surrounding nations. We read how Israel did not have faith, but have you wondered how and why they turned to demonism? Why would they do that? And could that happen to us today?

But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Corinthians 10:5–11).

Even though they had God's perfect way, Israel was tempted by lust, idolatry and a host of other things. As carnal humans they desired inappropriate things. And if that is what Israel did, we need to be careful that we do not do the same thing. We have the same mind, or nature, as the Israelites, and therefore we have the same temptations. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote that the things that happened to Israel were examples for us, today, and that we should not make the same mistakes.

If Israel was tempted by lust, idolatry and other things, we can be similarly tempted. Our minds, naturally, reject spiritual things and gravitate toward those things that are considered lust, idolatry and every other thing contrary to God's perfect way. We need to fight the pull of our minds and bring them into subjection. But not only that, what constitutes our minds, our thoughts, desires and emotions, can be influenced by Satan and his cohorts. It is through our thoughts, desires and emotions that Satan plays his "mind games" that can influence us. It is this subtle and deceptive technique that we need to be aware of and to resist.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

Are you willing to admit that you not only can be, but at times may have been, influenced by Satan? Or, do you think that because you know the Truth, are striving to overcome personal weaknesses, and are diligently making efforts to stay close to God with the spiritual tools we have been given, that you are immune to these attacks? Do you think that because you know the Truth, and have a down payment of the Holy Spirit, you automatically resist these attacks?

At a certain time, Jesus began to explain to the apostles that He would be killed and raised three days afterward. Peter, not understanding this was God's plan, responded to Jesus' statement.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matthew 16:22–23).

Jesus replied to Peter, but rebuked Satan. Can you imagine Jesus turning to you and directly rebuking Satan? Because Peter did not comprehend the fact that Jesus was to be crucified, resurrected and return a second time, he said something to Jesus that reflected his thoughts and emotions. He did not want it to happen. Satan was able to capitalize on those natural thoughts, and Peter made a statement based on his emotions which were in opposition to God's will. Satan influenced Peter's natural thoughts, and that is why Jesus rebuked him.

But the Holy Spirit was not yet given, so Peter did not have the automatic ability to resist Satan's attacks, right? Since we have been given a down payment of the Holy Spirit, we are immune to that kind of attack, right? We do have power for recognition and resistance, but not immunity. Why? Jesus Christ teaches us.

## **The Example of Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ was human, and fully God at the same time. He had a full measure of the Holy Spirit and never sinned. Yet, Satan attempted to influence His mind so that He would sin and thwart God's plan.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Matthew 4:1).

Jesus was attacked, mentally, in three general areas which frequently dominate human beings' natural thoughts and emotions. They are:

- 1) What will man give up or do to satisfy hunger?
- 2) The strong proclivity to extol, or praise, the self, or to substantiate personal greatness.
- 3) An intense desire for power, prestige, or image.

Jesus was not a victim of the temptations, and He resisted Satan who therefore departed from Him. Jesus Christ set the example for us. He resisted Satan, and Satan fled from Him, temporarily.

And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season (Luke 4:13).

## **What Are Our Defenses?**

If Jesus is our example, and Satan tried to influence His mind, then we are subject to the same thing. However, we have been given the ability to recognize and resist these spiritual attacks against us.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet

shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Ephesians 6:10–18).

### **Watch Ye Therefore**

Satan takes advantage of man's natural concern for physical life and those physical things that surround him. He will capitalize on the thoughts and emotions our carnal minds generate, stir them up and try to push us in the wrong direction. And why does God allow the called to encounter such tests, trials and influences? Before granting immortal life He must know if there is anything that might cause us to turn, lose faith or act in a rebellious manner. These are character-building opportunities. What then must we do?

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come (Matthew 24:42).

Being aware of the times in which we live is important. World events affect us and provide a general indication of the escalation of Satan's influence. The primary thing we must watch, though, is not world events. Knowledge of those things will not help us in personal mastery and overcoming. Primarily we must watch ourselves. We must watch our minds, our conversion and our personal overcoming. Our minds are of the flesh, not of the Spirit. We must work diligently to maintain proper thinking and a proper outlook on things, and resist Satan as he attempts to amplify our wrong thoughts. How might he do this? What are the kinds of things we need to resist? Below are two examples and broad categories that are common to the carnal mind and that Satan tries to exploit. You can expand this list and use these examples as a tool to evaluate your thoughts in various areas.

1. A Physical Orientation. If your dominant objective is for the physical, and not the spiritual, you can easily be swayed to inappropriately desire physical things. If you count the possession of certain physical things as the illustration of God's blessings to you, and are frustrated because you do not have those things you want, what might you conclude? Possibly that God is not blessing you. Or, that God is not really a good and fair God because He has withheld those things from you. If you had those things, then you could be happy and know God was blessing you. By thinking that, you may be questioning the goodness of God and the character-building process He is working in your life. If you

faintly think these things, Satan can amplify those thoughts and blast loudly that God is not a good God, not fair to you, or not blessing you because you do not have those things you want. Those wrong thoughts can then grow out of proportion and strengthen your contrary view of God. And if that is your weakness, he will attack those thoughts and emotions in an attempt to make you question God.

2. Blindness. Do you see your faults specifically, or hide behind generalizations? The more any of us avoids identifying specific faults, we can become spiritually blinded to our current state and not effect needed change. How can we continue with personal mastery and overcoming if we do not see what we need to master and overcome? One of the traits we have, by nature, is the proclivity to avoid recognizing and admitting personal faults. It is a characteristic of our minds. We will admit to faults generically, but avoid meaningful, specific faults. If we have those general thoughts, how might Satan capitalize? He may amplify our thoughts and push ideas like: "The faults you have identified are enough, you don't need a deeper examination." Or, "Just concentrate on these generalities now, you can focus on details later." The danger is that we fail to focus on these things now. These are the types of thoughts that can derail us from proper examination and overcoming. They are subtle thoughts that negatively affect us, and explain why Satan is as devious and dangerous as he is.

It takes dedication, effort and the power of the Holy Spirit to change our carnal minds to reflect the mind of Jesus Christ. Our minds by nature reject spiritual things, and that is why we are constantly working to control them. Satan and his cohorts play upon our thoughts and emotions that are contrary to God's mind. That influence can increase the intensity of our wrong thoughts, separating us from God, or distract us from thinking correct thoughts, separating us from God.

Just because a thought comes to mind does not mean it is correct. "That brother or sister in the faith doesn't need my help." "It's not really medicine." "I've overcome enough." "I know we were taught this, but . . . ." "I'm doing enough Bible study and prayer." Besides the big things, we must also be aware of the small things. The subtle thought or emotion. Is it of God, or not?

God has called us to overcome and to qualify for His Kingdom. It is achievable for those He has called. As we continue to work on personal mastery, we need to be mindful of the fact that our enemy is working hard to influence and to deceive us through manipulation of our thoughts and emotions. We need to be mindful of the fact that our thoughts and emotions are not always correct, and that Satan can intentionally intensify those thoughts and emotions, making them feel even more correct. We will then be more confident in our actions, but the reality is that they are not bringing us closer to God.

What evil deception! The more we are aware of this, the more we can discern the spirits and stay on course.

God has provided all that we need. Let us continue to draw close to Him, work on the personal mastery of our minds, resist Satan's attempts to subtly influence us, and look forward to His glorious Kingdom.

With much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert G. Burke