

without blood, sweat and tears. *Surviving sin*, let it be said once more, is *not reigning sin*, but it is *real sin*.

This picture is further elucidated in the New Testament. The conflict within is heightened by the tension between 'the flesh' and 'the Spirit'. Here 'the flesh' does not mean 'the body'. It means *the whole man* in his creatureliness, weakness and sinfulness. Consequently among the sins of the flesh Scripture lists activities of the mind as well as of the body (cf. Gal. 5:19-21). 'The flesh in this sense,' writes Dr Leon Morris, 'denotes the whole personality of man as organised in the wrong direction, as directed to earthly pursuits rather than the service of God' (*New Bible Dictionary*: p. 426). In a word it is human nature dominated by sin.

But the Christian is not 'in the flesh' (Rom. 8:9 R.S.V). He is 'in the Spirit'. He is dominated by Christ through the Spirit. Yet the flesh remains in him in the sense that sin remains in him. Two further considerations must be mentioned. (i) While the flesh remains, the Spirit of God, operating *via* the new life God has given us, makes war on the flesh (Gal. 5:17). As new creatures we would battle against it in any case but this is an added encouragement. (ii) Paul tells us that 'those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' (Gal. 5:24). These words need to be clearly distinguished from the teaching of such passages as Romans 6:1 ff and Galatians 2:20. Here Paul does not describe the decisive act of God in us through union with Christ, but *our* decisive rejection of sin when we join ourselves to Christ by faith. The language is harsh, but realistic. It refers to the brutal (and unnatural) response which the believer decisively made to sin at his conversion, and which he ratifies throughout the whole course of his Christian life.

Perhaps we can best summarise the situation in a table format:

<i>For God</i>	<i>Against God</i>
The new creature	The flesh
The Holy Spirit	The Devil
The decisive break with sin through faith	The world

In each case, Scripture assures us that the powers which are for us are far greater than those ranged against us. The victory

## 15

### Crucifying Sin

In the previous chapter we began to consider the various conflicts in which the Christian is engaged, and in doing so concentrated on what we called the conflicts 'without'. That is not to say, of course, that these spiritual battles are fought 'over our heads' as it were. The enemies we face attack us from outside our own hearts and move inward with insistent force to draw our affections towards themselves and away from our Lord Jesus Christ. But their power rests on a further factor, namely the 'landing ground' they are able to find within our own lives.

When our Lord detected that his hour had come and that Satan was now advancing to meet him, he was able to say that 'he has no hold on me' (Jn. 14:30). There was nothing in our Lord's character which could be employed as a natural fulcrum by which Satan could lever his way into Jesus' life. But, sadly, that is not true of us. We have already hinted that there is still, in the Christian, a base of operations from which Satan is able to work, an enemy within, a 'Quisling' of the heart. We are faced with the prospect of recognising and dealing with this problem.

The cause of our battle 'within' is the continuing presence of indwelling sin. When we discussed Paul's teaching that the Christian has died to sin, we noted that this does not mean that sin has died in him. It remains, and it is still sin. What has changed is not its presence within our hearts, but its status (it no longer reigns) and our relationship to it (we are no longer its slaves). We saw what a radical thing this is and what a glorious deliverance it provides. But it does so in order that we may deal with sin in our Christian life from a perspective of victory. Not only has our relationship to it changed, but God has planted within us his divine seed (1 Jn. 3:9), and in this sense has 'added' to our powers as well as subtracting from sin's status! We have good reason to enter the conflict with the enemy of sin in optimistic mood! Not for a moment, however, dare we delude ourselves into thinking that the victory will be won consistently

*Reign (No) vs Remain (Yes)*

phen's Walbrook in London in the middle of the seventeenth century wrote on this precise question:

*How shall we perceive when a motion comes from our own hearts, and when from Satan?*

It is hard, as Bernard says, to distinguish *inter morsum serpentis et morbum mentis* [between the bite of the serpent and the disease of the mind], between those suggestions which come from Satan, and which breed out of our own hearts. But I conceive there is this three-fold difference:

1. Such motions to evil as come from our own hearts spring up more leisurely, and by degrees. Sin is long concocted in the thoughts, ere consent be given; but usually we may know a motion comes from Satan by its suddenness. Temptation is compared to a dart, because it is shot suddenly. Eph. 6:16. David's numbering the people was a motion which the devil injected suddenly.

2. The motions to evil which come from our own hearts are not so terrible. Few are frightened at the sight of their own children; but motions coming from Satan are more ghastly and frightful, as motions to blasphemy and self-murder. Hence it is that temptations are compared to fiery darts, because, as flashes of fire, they startle and affright the soul. Eph. 6:16.

3. When evil thoughts are thrown into the mind, when we loathe and have reluctance to them; when we strive against them, and flee from them, as Moses did from the serpent, it shows they are not the natural birth of our own heart, but the hand of Job is in this. 2 Sam. 14:19. Satan has injected these impure emotions.

*A Body of Divinity*, p. 588

Clearly there is no easy way. At no point of our experience do we come to the place where we can rely on a fool-proof system which will lead us unharmed through our pilgrimage. We follow a Shepherd, and we must always have our gaze fixed towards him. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of God's word and his ways, we will naturally become more sensitive to the distinctions between the imaginations of our own minds, the temptations of our own hearts, the workings of Satan, and

the clear voice of Christ. To recognise his voice is the privilege of every Christian (Jn. 10:27). It is a voice which becomes more distinguishable as we obey it. But the more we obey it, the more determination will Satan show in his efforts to confuse us and lead us astray. Surely to be a Christian is to be engaged in an 'irreconcilable war'! In the next chapter we will have to consider how the battles which it involves take place not only with an enemy outside of our lives, but also with a fifth column of resistance within our own hearts.



which we can distinguish the true leading of Christ from the deceptive work of the Devil:

(a) *Christ's voice is always in accord with the true meaning and application of Scripture*, while Satan often mishandles Scripture and employs it for ends other than those for which it was originally given.

(b) *Christ's wisdom has the characteristics of Christ himself. It is pure and peace-loving* (Jas. 3:17). But by contrast it is often characteristic of the work of Satan that he brings and breeds restlessness and discontent. The 'wisdom' he sows himself, or through his agents, brings disagreement and mars the harmony between our own hearts and God's, and also between our own lives and those of our fellow-Christians.

(c) *Christ's entreaties are gentle, just as he himself is gentle.* But the entreaties of Satan are described by Paul as 'flaming arrows' (Eph. 6:16). They set the mind on fire, producing panic in the will, unbalancing our faith.

(d) *Christ calls us into the fellowship of his suffering* (Phil. 3:10), but the great hall-mark of Satan's leading is to draw us away from that union and fellowship with Christ and his Cross. Just as he endeavoured to draw the Lord Christ away from the Cross, first in the wilderness temptations and later through Simon Peter (Mk. 8:33), so he wants to take our affections as far away as possible from loving and trusting our suffering and crucified Master. He knows that the principle of the Cross is the seed-bed of spiritual usefulness (Jn. 12:24-26). He will pay any price to prevent us from practical experience of it.

But even when we have learned that mature spiritual discernment which enables us to distinguish between Christ and a disguised Satan like this, we have one further area to guard.

(iii) Distinguishing between Satan and our own hearts

In some ways this is a yet more difficult task, for the fundamental reason that there is a kinship between the remnants of indwelling sin in our hearts and the designs of the Evil One. We look in vain, by and large, for spiritual guidance at this kind of level in today's church. But once more we can be helped by the communion of saints. Thomas Watson, the rector of St Ste-

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this demonic beast bears some of Christ's outward characteristics, for it is the purpose of our enemy to deceive us and lead us astray. In fact the word used for 'deceive' basically means 'to cause to wander or stray' and so, 'to lead into error, or to deceive'. What an accurate picture, and one which is so consistent with everything else we know about the Devil! Right at the very start of human history the Bible tells us he employed deceit to captivate Eve, and Paul explicitly states this: 'the woman who was deceived' (1 Tim. 2:14). He blinds the minds of men and so is able to lead them astray (2 Cor. 4:4).

He is called the *Accuser of the brethren*. The word is *katēgoros*. It comes from a verb which means 'to accuse before a tribunal'. It is the picture of the Devil as the counsel for the prosecution against the child of God, bringing before the court the sins and misdeeds of the believer's life, demanding that he be cut off from the presence of God. The Devil is one who makes believers' guilt and failures his stock in trade.

*Bowed down beneath a load of sin*

*By Satan sorely pressed,*

*By war without and fears within,*

*I come to Thee for rest.*

*Be Thou my Shield and Hiding-place*

*That, sheltered near Thy side,*

*I may my fierce accuser face,*

*And tell him Thou hast died.*

John Newton

(ii) Distinguishing Christ from Satan

The apostle Paul assures us that we not only know something of the person of Satan, but also that 'we are not unaware of his schemes' (2 Cor. 2:11). We have noted that one of these schemes is to distort our perception of his presence. He appears masquerading as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). This raises for us a most pressing practical question. How can we distinguish the voice of Satan, and his hand in our affairs, from the voice and hand of our Lord Jesus Christ? How, by an appreciation of the difference, can we guard ourselves against Satan's wiles, and employ the 'whole armour of God'? There are four ways in



it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:4-5

### THE DEVIL

The world, however, is inanimate. The Christian faces another dimension of conflict with an animate enemy. He engages in conflict with Satan. When we think about the conflict with Satan there are twin dangers to be avoided. The first is that of paying too little attention to him. The second is the error of making too much of him so that we lose sight of Christ and his victory, or are paralysed with irrational fears about the power of evil, or even begin to live as though, with diminished responsibility, we were the helpless pawns of his strategies. None of these attitudes corresponds to the realism and the sense of victory which pervades the New Testament teaching. There the full force of Satan's power is recognised, but it is looked upon in the light of Christ's victory. Indeed, it is axiomatic in our understanding of Christian doctrine that it is only in the light of the full revelation of God in Christ that we can perceive the kingdom of darkness clearly enough to understand its powers. In the Old Testament Satan is a relatively shadowy figure, just as in the same pages Christ appears only between the lines. But when we turn the pages of the New Testament we discover that Christ's coming drew Satan out of the shadows, and in many passages he appears fully revealed as the instigator of sin and sorrow. Several features of this New Testament unveiling should be noticed:

#### (i) The person and work of Satan

The Bible's position is that Satan is a creature, made by God for his own glory. Many Christians have seen hints of his origin and fall in such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. But by no means is that interpretation universally held. John Calvin, for example (who could scarcely be accused of not believing in the personal existence of Satan) wrote about the former passage:

The exposition of this passage which some have given, as if it referred to Satan, has arisen from ignorance, for the con-

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text shows that these statements must be understood in reference to the King of the Babylonians.

Isaiah, I, p. 442

None the less, there are clear statements in the New Testament which would seem to be best understood as allusions to Satan's fall. Jesus speaks of Satan as 'a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him' (Jn. 8:44). John adds in his First Letter that 'the devil has been sinning from the beginning' (1 Jn. 3:8). Some unimaginable rebellion appears to have taken place in the kingdom of heaven before the Fall of man. More than that we probably cannot say. More than that we do not require to know.

What we can learn from with profit, however, is the list of names by which Satan is designated in the New Testament. Just as the titles for Christ tell us much about him, so the titles used for Satan tell us more than that he is a liar (Jn. 8:44) and a hinderer (1 Thess. 2:18).

He is the *Devil*. The name comes from the Greek verb *to throw*, and came to mean throwing in the sense of slandering. As is his name, so is his nature. The Devil trades in false statements. He twists the truth about Christ, and about the character of God in the world at large (how few people have any clear idea of the depths of God's love for men and its holy nature!), but also in the hearts of Christians. How insidiously he infers in the conscience of God's children that their Saviour is 'not really' all that he is made out to be. It is better, wiser, safer, suggests the Devil, not to trust Christ too far.

He is also called *Satan*. Some scholars have suggested that the root idea of this word conveys the sense of someone lying in ambush. If that is so it graphically portrays a common element of Christian conflict. For we often are not aware how or why times of temptation, stress, conflict and evil pressure have appeared. There can be no doubt that some of the irrational fears, doubts and thoughts which Christians experience should be traced back to the ambush in which Satan hides.

He is also called the *Deceiver*. In Revelation 13:11 we read about 'another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.' In Revelation the lamb-figure normally represents Christ. It is no accident that



No transgression against him/her was committed. There was no social issue involved; it was a heart sin only. If any social acts, words, etc., accompanied the lust (improper words or suggestive advances, for instance), these should be confessed to the one approached in this manner and forgiveness sought. **The principle, then, is a sin is confessed as narrowly as the offense; in some cases, that involves God and the sinner alone.** All sin requires confession to God, but only some requires confessions to other persons as well.

Next, let us ask, how does one confess sin to another? When confession of sin to human beings takes place, it must be done with great care. Counselors must explain how/how not to do so, warn of dangers, and (in general) safeguard confession against the many possible abuses that (so often) one finds associated with the practice.<sup>36</sup>

To begin with, *what* one says is important. In identifying his offense to another, the confessor must be careful about his content and his language. There are things that ought not to be said (Eph. 5:12). Today, under the guise of "openness," that passage is regularly ignored. Christians may *not* be free and open to say anything they please; they may say only those things that please God. In reporting sexual sins, for example, details are neither necessary nor proper. If a confessor seems caught up in titillating details of sexual exploits, the likelihood is that he has not actually repented of the sin, but is still vicariously trying to get kicks out of it. The attitude of heart in the confessor is important. While counselors cannot judge counselees' hearts, they can (must) warn them about the problem. One can confess sexual sin *cleanly*—as the Bible speaks of it. The Bible is neither prudish nor suggestive, but always strikes a frank, non-detailed, honest posture when reporting sexual sin. Clear direction, plain discussion of the point, etc., by counselors, is needed.

How does the counselor guard against such abuses? Let me suggest that he warn directly against several problems whenever it may be appropriate.

1. Tell counselees to avoid highly connotative language (language that tends to titillate, that tends to aggravate, etc.). They will do well to use simple, factual terms, and say what they have to

<sup>36</sup> The suggestions that follow are but suggestive. Counselors should study the subject and be prepared for all of the many contingencies that may arise.

say as briefly as possible (Prov. 10:19).

2. Warn counselees against destroying good words by bad attitudes (Prov. 25:11). Urge them to be sure that they go for proper reasons in the right spirit.
3. Guard against someone ruining a confession by describing his own sin accusingly:<sup>37</sup> "Forgive me for saying what I did when you pulled that dirty trick on me." Look out for "but you too" attitudes.
4. Make sure that the counselee understands that he may not attach excuses to his confession. Here, watch out for "even though" qualifications: "Even though the pressures were great, I guess I shouldn't have done that."

Some habits of speech are so ingrained that counselees will find themselves saying such things without realizing it. Role play of the potential confession scene between the counselor/counselee often can be useful in detecting (and deflecting) such problems.

It is important to seek forgiveness when confessing rather than apologizing. To make this clear, let me quote from my book, *Update on Christian Counseling*, vol. 1:

#### DON'T APOLOGIZE

It is time to say it clearly—so that no one may misunderstand: the Bible nowhere advises or allows (and certainly doesn't command) apology.

Yet, in spite of this fact, Christians (and even Christian counselors) somehow seem to be addicted to apologizing and advising counselees to "go apologize" to others whom they have wronged. To all such, I have one piece of advice: Stop it!

"Well, what on earth is wrong with apologies?"

Fundamentally, two things.

#### I

An apology is an inadequate, humanistic substitute for the real thing. Nowhere do the Scriptures require, or even encourage, apologizing. To say "I'm sorry" is a human dodge for doing what God has commanded. And (as we shall see) since it is man's substitute for God's requirement (and has all but replaced that requirement),

<sup>37</sup> He must first take the log out of his own eye. At a later time—after his own sin is cleared—he may raise other issues. The two must not be confused at the time of confession.



far beyond. In the chapter on Confession<sup>31</sup> he describes confession as the confession of “emotions” and “feelings.” Confession, according to Swihart, is “facing up to my own emotions, owning them as belonging to me and accepting the fact that they do exist in me no matter what they are.” There is no confession of sin to God or others; merely confession of emotions to one’s self. There is no biblical warrant for the Swihart teaching. What has happened is that a biblical term has been drained dry of its meaning and new psychological content has been poured into the word. Then, under the scriptural label, this psychological (not a biblical) concept has been palmed off as God’s way. Using the biblical word to teach psychology is one way to gain authority for the latter among God’s people. The Bible nowhere tells us that to get feelings out into the open and be honest about them is confession. The Bible is used to support psychological teaching; thus psychology is stamped with biblical authority while entirely by-passing what the Bible actually does say about confession. Such practices are altogether too frequently discovered in our day.

Now, I have mentioned the matter of confessing sin not only to God, but also to others (cf. Luke 15:18). That concern leads to several others.

First, note the importance of distinguishing between *heart sins* and *social sins*. These terms, without careful explanation, may be misleading. All sins (including social sins) are heart sins—i.e., at some point, the sin was in the heart before it was in the hand or on the lip. The sinner assents to the act, develops the desire, etc., in his heart. Even though he may never follow through in a social way, he has sinned. Perhaps out of fear, etc., the sinner fails to do what he desires to do; the sin never proceeds beyond the heart. So his sin has no direct<sup>32</sup> social effects. Such heart sins, nonetheless, are sins<sup>33</sup>—heinous and damning—and they must be confessed to God. Jesus called adultery of the heart “adultery” and not something else. The difference between heart sins

31. Philip Swihart, *How to Live with Your Feelings* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 43ff.

32. Inner attitudes and desires, persisted in, lead to indirect effects especially detected in deteriorating interpersonal relationships. The distinction between heart and social sins at points is rough, but important (as we shall see).

33. The inner temptation to sin must be distinguished from the sin. When temptation is inwardly resisted, there is no sin. Jesus had to entertain the possibility of sinning, when tempted by Satan, in order to reject it.

and social sins is the lack or presence of damaging social effects. Before God, desiring to violate any of His commandments is as rebellious as doing so. Of course (as His restraining common grace indicates), God hates the social effects of sin and is pleased to see His children not take the second step in which they put sinful thoughts into practice, but (rather) wishes them to repent and reject those thoughts before doing so.

But this discussion raises the question of how counselors should instruct counselees to confess heart sins. The matter is somewhat clearer with respect to sins with social effects. Counselees are instructed to confess them to God and to all others who have been wronged.<sup>34</sup> But what of heart sins, directed toward another brother or sister—let us say adultery of the heart, fornication of the heart, homosexuality of the heart.<sup>35</sup> All these desires go no further than the heart (the inner life), but they are sins. Does the sinner, in such cases, confess both to God and to the one at whom his inner sin was directed? Or does he confess to God alone?

The Bible indicates that a sin ought to be confessed as widely as the sin’s direct effects extend (cf. Matt. 18:15ff.). First one goes privately to the one person who has been wronged (against whom a direct offense has been committed and from whom he is now estranged). He may not go to others (not even to office bearers). There is an endeavor to contain the problem. Only after every attempt at that level fails is he permitted to call in one or two others as arbiters or counselors (and ultimately as witnesses). Only if they will not be heard does the matter come before the church. Clearly, there is a reluctance to widen or spread matters any further than necessary. This is an important principle that applies to group counseling, etc., but that also has bearing on our question. It means that if no offense has estranged the counselee from another, he need not (must not) go.

That means that there are some sins that must be confessed to God alone. Lustful thoughts toward another is a good example. Counselees must be instructed to confess such sin to God (as a violation of His commandment) but not to the person who was the object of the lust.

34. There are problems associated with doing so, to which we shall come at length.

35. Bitterness, resentment, anger; self-pity, jealousy, envy, sinful doubt are other common problems.





explained to you with complete satisfaction, there is an overwhelming biblical witness to the need for confession to human beings and the need to be forgiven by and reconciled to them. The evidence is clear that all sin is sin against God, but also that much sin is also sin against man. The proper way to view the situation is the way Jesus proposes when He puts into the mouth of the prodigal son these words: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18).

*"But what, then, do David's words mean?"*

That is a good question. Two answers have been given. The first, that since Nathan's exposure of his sin, which, up until then, David had managed to keep quiet, had come with such a shocking intensity ("Thou art the man"), David (as the psalm shows) was overwhelmed with grief and could see nothing but the horrendous wrong he had done against God. It is this to which his words refer. Because he was so sensitive to his relationship to God, it was this and this alone that dominated his thought.

There is another interpretation that translates the verse "Before Thee, Thee only." That is to say, since the sin was done in secret (2 Sam. 12:12) God, and only God knew about it. David here is acknowledging that God, therefore, had sent Nathan, as His messenger to expose the sin he had kept under wraps and call him to repentance.

Whatever the best way to understand the verse, it is clear that in verse 14, where David refers to his bloodguiltiness, he acknowledges his wrong against Uriah.

One fact stands out. Whenever one sins against his brother, he has, thereby, sinned against God as well. There can never, therefore, be an occasion on which a Christian, obligated to confess sin to another and seek his forgiveness, is not also obligated to do the same toward God. Indeed, one of the ways in which he may possibly approach his brother, may be by assuring him that he has sought God's forgiveness and that he is now seeking his. But the two are bound up together. One cannot seek God's forgiveness, and intend later on to seek his brother's forgiveness if and when he gets

around to it. He may not separate the two. In praying to God, he must express a genuine desire and intention to be reconciled to his brother. Otherwise, as we have seen, God is not willing to reestablish warm fatherly relationships.

### The Matter of "Heart Sins"

Not all sins are outward transgressions against another. When Jesus spoke of committing adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28), He was referring to what I am here calling a "heart sin." The heart sin is known only to God and the sinner. It is not known to the one toward whom the sinful thought in the heart is directed. Lust, anger, envy, etc., that flare up in the heart, but are dealt with before they are outwardly manifested, need not be confessed to anyone but God. Indeed, confession to persons totally unaware of what you are thinking can lead to additional sin and unnecessary hurt.

Heart sins must be carefully distinguished from other transgressions, unknown to other parties to whom you are obligated to confess and seek forgiveness. Consider this common scenario. A husband or wife has committed adultery. The fact is unknown to his or her spouse. The affair is called off, the sinner is repentant, and wants to know what his or her responsibilities toward the spouse are. Many (wrongly) advise, "Don't tell your spouse. If you do, you will only cause more trouble and heartache. What she or he doesn't know won't hurt."

David Augsburger says he once advised a man not to tell his wife about an affair:

"Then don't," I suggested.

"You mean I don't have to tell her about it to find forgiveness?"

"Well, that all depends on you. If you can accept God's forgiveness and trust Him with your guilt feelings, maybe you won't need to open it up to her to get relief."

This is poor advice. At first it may seem the kind and







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(b) *Christ's wisdom has the characteristics of Christ himself. It is pure and peace-loving* (Jas. 3:17). But by contrast it is often characteristic of the work of Satan that he brings and breeds restlessness and discontent. The 'wisdom' he sows himself, or through his agents, brings disagreement and mars the harmony between our own hearts and God's, and also between our own lives and those of our fellow-Christians.

(c) *Christ's entreaties are gentle, just as he himself is gentle*. But the entreaties of Satan are described by Paul as 'flaming arrows' (Eph. 6:16). They set the mind on fire, producing panic in the will, unbalancing our faith.

(d) *Christ calls us into the fellowship of his suffering* (Phil. 3:10), but the great hall-mark of Satan's leading is to draw us away from that union and fellowship with Christ and his Cross. Just as he endeavoured to draw the Lord Christ away from the Cross, first in the wilderness temptations and later through Simon Peter (Mk. 8:33), so he wants to take our affections as far away as possible from loving and trusting our suffering and crucified Master. He knows that the principle of the Cross is the seed-bed of spiritual usefulness (Jn. 12:24-26). He will pay any price to prevent us from practical experience of it.

But even when we have learned that mature spiritual discernment which enables us to distinguish between Christ and a disguised Satan like this, we have one further area to guard.

(iii) Distinguishing between Satan and our own hearts

In some ways this is a yet more difficult task, for the fundamental reason that there is a kinship between the remnants of indwelling sin in our hearts and the designs of the Evil One. We look in vain, by and large, for spiritual guidance at this kind of level in today's church. But once more we can be helped by the communion of saints. Thomas Watson, the rector of St Ste-



it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:4-5

### THE DEVIL

The world, however, is inanimate. The Christian faces another dimension of conflict with an animate enemy. He engages in conflict with Satan. When we think about the conflict with Satan there are twin dangers to be avoided. The first is that of paying too little attention to him. The second is the error of making too much of him so that we lose sight of Christ and his victory, or are paralysed with irrational fears about the power of evil, or even begin to live as though, with diminished responsibility, we were the helpless pawns of his strategies. None of these attitudes corresponds to the realism and the sense of victory which pervades the New Testament teaching. There the full force of Satan's power is recognised, but it is looked upon in the light of Christ's victory. Indeed, it is axiomatic in our understanding of Christian doctrine that it is only in the light of the full revelation of God in Christ that we can perceive the kingdom of darkness clearly enough to understand its powers. In the Old Testament Satan is a relatively shadowy figure, just as in the same pages Christ appears only between the lines. But when we turn the pages of the New Testament we discover that Christ's coming drew Satan out of the shadows, and in many passages he appears fully revealed as the instigator of sin and sorrow. Several features of this New Testament unveiling should be noticed:

#### (i) The person and work of Satan

The Bible's position is that Satan is a creature, made by God for his own glory. Many Christians have seen hints of his origin and fall in such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. But by no means is that interpretation universally held. John Calvin, for example (who could scarcely be accused of not believing in the personal existence of Satan) wrote about the former passage:

The exposition of this passage which some have given, as if it referred to Satan, has arisen from ignorance, for the con-

text shows that these statements must be understood in reference to the King of the Babylonians.

Isaiah, I, p. 442

None the less, there are clear statements in the New Testament which would seem to be best understood as allusions to Satan's fall. Jesus speaks of Satan as 'a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him' (Jn. 8:44). John adds in his First Letter that 'the devil has been sinning from the beginning' (1 Jn. 3:8). Some unimaginable rebellion appears to have taken place in the kingdom of heaven before the Fall of man. More than that we probably cannot say. More than that we do not require to know.

What we can learn from with profit, however, is the list of names by which Satan is designated in the New Testament. Just as the titles for Christ tell us much about him, so the titles used for Satan tell us more than that he is a liar (Jn. 8:44) and a hinderer (1 Thess. 2:18).

He is the *Devil*. The name comes from the Greek verb *to throw*, and came to mean throwing in the sense of 'slandering'. As is his name, so is his nature. The Devil trades in false statements. He twists the truth about Christ, and about the character of God in the world at large (how few people have any clear idea of the depths of God's love for men and its holy nature!), but also in the hearts of Christians. How insidiously he infers in the conscience of God's children that their Saviour is 'not really' all that he is made out to be. It is better, wiser, safer, suggests the Devil, not to trust Christ too far.

He is also called *Satan*. Some scholars have suggested that the root idea of this word conveys the sense of someone lying in ambush. If that is so it graphically portrays a common element of Christian conflict. For we often are not aware how or why times of temptation, stress, conflict and evil pressure have appeared. There can be no doubt that some of the irrational fears, doubts and thoughts which Christians experience should be traced back to the ambush in which Satan hides.

He is also called the *Deceiver*. In Revelation 13:11 we read about 'another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.' In Revelation the lamb-figure normally represents Christ. It is no accident that





explained to you with complete satisfaction, there is an overwhelming biblical witness to the need for confession to human beings and the need to be forgiven by and reconciled to them. The evidence is clear that all sin is sin against God, but also that much sin is also sin against man. The proper way to view the situation is the way Jesus proposes when He puts into the mouth of the prodigal son these words: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18).

*"But what, then, do David's words mean?"*

That is a good question. Two answers have been given. The first, that since Nathan's exposure of his sin, which, up until then, David had managed to keep quiet, had come with such a shocking intensity ("Thou art the man"), David (as the psalm shows) was overwhelmed with grief and could see nothing but the horrendous wrong he had done against God. It is this to which his words refer. Because he was so sensitive to his relationship to God, it was this and this alone that dominated his thought.

There is another interpretation that translates the verse "Before Thee, Thee only." That is to say, since the sin was done in secret (2 Sam. 12:12) God, and only God knew about it. David here is acknowledging that God, therefore, had sent Nathan, as His messenger to expose the sin he had kept under wraps and call him to repentance.

Whatever the best way to understand the verse, it is clear that in verse 14, where David refers to his bloodguiltiness, he acknowledges his wrong against Uriah.

One fact stands out. Whenever one sins against his brother, he has, thereby, sinned against God as well. There can never, therefore, be an occasion on which a Christian, obligated to confess sin to another and seek his forgiveness, is not also obligated to do the same toward God. Indeed, one of the ways in which he may possibly approach his brother, may be by assuring him that he has sought God's forgiveness and that he is now seeking his. But the two are bound up together. One cannot seek God's forgiveness, and intend later on to seek his brother's forgiveness if and when he gets

around to it. He may not separate the two. In praying to God, he must express a genuine desire and intention to be reconciled to his brother. Otherwise, as we have seen, God is not willing to reestablish warm fatherly relationships.

### The Matter of "Heart Sins"

Not all sins are outward transgressions against another. When Jesus spoke of committing adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28), He was referring to what I am here calling a "heart sin." The heart sin is known only to God and the sinner. It is not known to the one toward whom the sinful thought in the heart is directed. Lust, anger, envy, etc., that flare up in the heart, but are dealt with before they are outwardly manifested, need not be confessed to anyone but God. Indeed, confession to persons totally unaware of what you are thinking can lead to additional sin and unnecessary hurt.

Heart sins must be carefully distinguished from other transgressions, unknown to other parties to whom you *are* obligated to confess and seek forgiveness. Consider this common scenario. A husband or wife has committed adultery. The fact is unknown to his or her spouse. The affair is called off, the sinner is repentant, and wants to know what his or her responsibilities toward the spouse are. Many (wrongly) advise, "Don't tell your spouse. If you do, you will only cause more trouble and heartache. What she or he doesn't know won't hurt."

David Augsburg says he once advised a man not to tell his wife about an affair:

"Then don't," I suggested.

"You mean I don't have to tell her about it to find forgiveness?"

"Well, that all depends on you. If you can accept God's forgiveness and trust Him with your guilt feelings, maybe you won't need to open it up to her to get relief."

This is poor advice. At first it may seem the kind and

No transgression against him/her was committed. There was no social issue involved; it was a heart sin only. If any social acts, words, etc., accompanied the lust (improper words or suggestive advances, for instance), these should be confessed to the one approached in this manner and forgiveness sought. The principle, then, is *a sin is confessed as narrowly as the offense*; in some cases, that involves God and the sinner alone. All sin requires confession to God, but only some requires confessions to other persons as well.

Next, let us ask, how does one confess sin to another? When confession of sin to human beings takes place, it must be done with great care. Counselors must explain how/how not to do so, warn of dangers, and (in general) safeguard confession against the many possible abuses that (so often) one finds associated with the practice.<sup>36</sup>

To begin with, *what* one says is important. In identifying his offense to another, the confessor must be careful about his content and his language. There are things that ought not to be said (Eph. 5:12). Today, under the guise of "openness," that passage is regularly ignored. Christians may *not* be free and open to say anything they please; they may say only those things that please God. In reporting sexual sins, for example, details are neither necessary nor proper. If a confessor seems caught up in titillating details of sexual exploits, the likelihood is that he has not actually repented of the sin, but is still vicariously trying to get kicks out of it. The attitude of heart in the confessor is important. While counselors cannot judge counselees' hearts, they can (must) warn them about the problem. One can confess sexual sin *cleanly*—as the Bible speaks of it. The Bible is neither prudish nor suggestive, but always strikes a frank, non-detailed, honest posture when reporting sexual sin. Clear direction, plain discussion of the point, etc., by counselors, is needed.

How does the counselor guard against such abuses? Let me suggest that he warn directly against several problems whenever it may be appropriate.

1. Tell counselees to avoid highly connotative language (language that tends to titillate, that tends to aggravate, etc.). They will do well to use simple, factual terms, and say what they have to

36. The suggestions that follow are but suggestive. Counselors should study the subject and be prepared for all of the many contingencies that may arise.

say as briefly as possible (Prov. 10:19).

2. Warn counselees against destroying good words by bad attitudes (Prov. 25:11). Urge them to be sure that they go for proper reasons in the right spirit.
3. Guard against someone ruining a confession by describing his own sin accusingly:<sup>37</sup> "Forgive me for saying what I did when you pulled that dirty trick on me." Look out for "but you too" attitudes.
4. Make sure that the counselee understands that he may not attach excuses to his confession. Here, watch out for "even though" qualifications: "Even though the pressures were great, I guess I shouldn't have done that."

Some habits of speech are so ingrained that counselees will find themselves saying such things without realizing it. Role play of the potential confession scene between the counselor/counselee often can be useful in detecting (and deflecting) such problems.

It is important to seek forgiveness when confessing rather than apologizing. To make this clear, let me quote from my book, *Update on Christian Counseling*, vol. 1:

#### DON'T APOLOGIZE

It is time to say it clearly—so that no one may misunderstand: the Bible nowhere advises or allows (and certainly doesn't command) apology.

Yet, in spite of this fact, Christians (and even Christian counselors) somehow seem to be addicted to apologizing and advising counselees to "go apologize" to others whom they have wronged. To all such, I have one piece of advice: Stop it!

"Well, what on earth is wrong with apologies?" Fundamentally, two things.

#### I

An apology is an inadequate, humanistic substitute for the real thing. Nowhere do the Scriptures require, or even encourage, apologizing. To say "I'm sorry" is a human dodge for doing what God has commanded. And (as we shall see) since it is man's substitute for God's requirement (and has all but replaced that requirement),

37. He must first take the log out of his own eye. At a later time—after his own sin is cleared—he may raise other issues. The two must not be confused at the time of confession.



far beyond. In the chapter on Confession<sup>31</sup> he describes confession as the confession of "emotions" and "feelings." Confession, according to Swihart, is "facing up to my own emotions, owning them as belonging to me and accepting the fact that they do exist in me no matter what they are." There is no confession of sin to God or others; merely confession of emotions to one's self. There is no biblical warrant for the Swihart teaching. What has happened is that a biblical term has been drained dry of its meaning and new psychological content has been poured into the word. Then, under the scriptural label, this psychological (not a biblical) concept has been palmed off as God's way. Using the biblical word to teach psychology is one way to gain authority for the latter among God's people. The Bible nowhere tells us that to get feelings out into the open and be honest about them is confession. The Bible is used to support psychological teaching; thus psychology is stamped with biblical authority while entirely by-passing what the Bible actually does say about confession. Such practices are altogether too frequently discovered in our day.

Now, I have mentioned the matter of confessing sin not only to God, but also to others (cf. Luke 15:18). That concern leads to several others.

First, note the importance of distinguishing between *heart sins* and *social sins*. These terms, without careful explanation, may be misleading. All sins (including social sins) are heart sins—i.e., at some point, the sin was in the heart before it was in the hand or on the lip. The sinner assents to the act, develops the desire, etc., in his heart. Even though he may never follow through in a social way, he has sinned. Perhaps out of fear, etc., the sinner fails to do what he desires to do; the sin never proceeds beyond the heart. So his sin has no direct<sup>32</sup> social effects. Such heart sins, nonetheless, are sins<sup>33</sup>—heinous and damning—and they must be confessed to God. Jesus called adultery of the heart "adultery" and not something else. The difference between heart sins

and social sins is the lack or presence of damaging social effects. Before God, desiring to violate any of His commandments is as rebellious as doing so. Of course (as His restraining common grace indicates), God hates the social effects of sin and is pleased to see His children not take the second step in which they put sinful thoughts into practice, but (rather) wishes them to repent and reject those thoughts before doing so.

But this discussion raises the question of how counselors should instruct counselees to confess heart sins. The matter is somewhat clearer with respect to sins with social effects. Counselees are instructed to confess them to God and to all others who have been wronged.<sup>34</sup> But what of heart sins, *directed* toward another brother or sister—let us say adultery of the heart, fornication of the heart, homosexuality of the heart.<sup>35</sup> All these desires go no further than the heart (the inner life), but they are sins. Does the sinner, in such cases, confess both to God and to the one at whom his inner sin was directed? Or does he confess to God alone?

The Bible indicates that a sin ought to be confessed as widely as the sin's direct effects extend (cf. Matt. 18:15ff.). First one goes *privately* to the one person who has been wronged (against whom a direct offense has been committed and from whom he is now estranged). He may not go to others (not even to office bearers). There is an endeavor to contain the problem. Only after every attempt at that level fails is he permitted to call in one or two others as arbiters or counselors (and ultimately as witnesses). Only if they will not be heard does the matter come before the church. Clearly, there is a reluctance to widen or spread matters any further than necessary. This is an important principle that applies to group counseling, etc., but that also has bearing on our question. It means that if no offense has estranged the counselee from another, he need not (must not) go.

That means that there are some sins that must be confessed to God alone. Lustful thoughts toward another is a good example. Counselees must be instructed to confess such sin to God (as a violation of His commandment) but not to the person who was the object of the lust.

34. There are problems associated with doing so, to which we shall come at length.

35. Bitterness, resentment, anger; self-pity, jealousy, envy, sinful doubt are other common problems.

31. Philip Swihart, *How to Live with Your Feelings* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 43ff.

32. Inner attitudes and desires, persisted in, lead to *indirect effects* especially detected in deteriorating interpersonal relationships. The distinction between *heart* and *social* sins at points is rough, but important (as we shall see).

33. The inner temptation to sin must be distinguished from the sin. When temptation is inwardly resisted, there is no sin. Jesus had to entertain the possibility of sinning, when tempted by Satan, *in order to reject it*.