

FORGIVING AND SATAN'S SCHEMES

I am coming to the conclusion that the importance of forgiving others cannot possibly be overstated. What brought me to this belief was a study of the devil's schemes, prompted by Paul's connecting them with forgiving in 2 Corinthians 2:10-11. He is encouraging the Corinthians to forgive, "so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

It is not difficult to come up with a summary of the devil's schemes. Many of them are noted in the Bible, and it's easy to see how they fit in the events of our lives. First, he is a liar (John 8:44). He lies to us about God, others, and ourselves. A personal example might be in order.

I had a much older sister who got married when I was four years old. I don't remember her living at home at all, but I loved her. So the loss of her presence and involvement in my life was huge. It was huge because the devil interpreted it falsely to my immature heart and mind. He convinced me that there must be something terribly wrong with me, that I was unworthy of love. The lie went like this: "Your sister didn't *really* love you, because she left, so no one else really loves you either. Even God probably doesn't like you very much and, by the way, it's all your fault." And I grew up believing that lie. It was not a cognitive thing that I put into words, but it colored everything. It was like the background upon which all my relationships and activities, hopes and fears played out. I did not even become aware of it until much later in life.

Satan's goals are noted in John 10:10. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." He wants to steal our joy, kill our hope, and destroy our faith. And with these comes a host of collateral damage – broken dreams, damaged self-worth, shattered relationships, alienation, and isolation, to name just a few.

Besides lying, there are other tools he uses to accomplish his goals. He accuses. Revelation 12:10 says that he accuses us before God day and night (to no avail, since the verse also says he has been thrown down). He also plants in our minds accusatory thoughts toward others, producing suspicion and alienation, and toward ourselves producing false guilt and shame.

He tempts. Just as he comprehensively tempted both Adam and Eve, and Jesus, so with us he uses a plethora of physical, emotional, and spiritual temptations. We tend to think of temptations as luring us with things we would want but shouldn't have. But it doesn't take much living in the real world to teach us that the temptation to self-pity when things are hard is very real. Pity parties are no fun, but we all succumb to them, at least now and then.

He blinds. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says he blinds the minds of the unbelieving to the light of the gospel. I have always thought this meant he blinds the minds of unbelievers, which he certainly does. But when we are in the midst of that pity party, which amounts to unbelief, the light and hope of the gospel are dim to us at best. We are not immune to his blinding influence just because we are Christians.

He sifts. At the last supper Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted permission to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31). When Peter protested, Jesus predicted that he would deny Him three times before morning. I can't give a spiritual definition of sifting, but from the flour analogy I would say that it is whatever brings to light anything within us that is not presently visible. When the events of our lives shake us to the very core, what is buried there often shows up in bold relief. It is a relief to know that Satan can only sift us as God permits.

He watches and waits. He has all the time in the world and he plans his attacks strategically to affect us in our areas of weakness, during times of vulnerability, or in places of temptation. I mentioned isolation as a by-product of his goals to steal, kill, and destroy. A lion watches the herd, waiting for a straggler or wanderer to become separated from the rest, and then he pounces. (See 1 Peter 5:8.)

So how does forgiving, or more to the point how does our *not* forgiving connect to Satan's schemes? Refusal to forgive is a major component in the destruction of relationships. Failure to forgive steals our joy and reduces to ashes our hope that things could ever be better. It opens the door to further lying and accusation. It isolates us from one another, making us easy prey for the devil. It blinds us to the truth that we are not helpless victims, but have the ability to choose to forgive, thereby releasing ourselves as well as our offender from the debt. It tempts us to revenge.

In short, failing to forgive plays right into the devil's hand in so many ways. It gives him more ground in our lives than anything else, from which he is free to wreak more havoc. There is no more important choice we can make in the realm of spiritual warfare than to forgive others. It sets us free; it frees God to work in the lives of the people who wound us, and it takes away Satan's platform to continue his nefarious work in our lives. Think about it.

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