

DON'T DO THE DEVIL'S JOB

- A. Introduction: Life in a fallen world is very difficult. Many things come our way, from small mishaps to major catastrophes, from minor annoyances to overwhelming pressures. These unwelcome troubles can move us from faith to fear, from confidence to uncertainty, from obedience to disobedience.
1. Matt 7:24-27--Jesus told a parable about two houses, both of which were hit by a storm. One house survived the storm. The other did not.
 - a. Jesus connected the different fates of the two houses to the Word of God. He said that the one that who hears and does what God says will survive life's storms. v24--hears and acts upon (Amp); puts them into practice (Phillips); acts accordingly (Rieu).
 - b. It isn't the circumstances of life themselves that destroy us, it's not knowing and doing God's Word in the midst of the circumstance.
 2. In this series, we're discussing how to deal with life's challenges in a way that keeps us from being moved by them. For the past few weeks we've looked at the fact that the Word of God instructs Christians to focus our attention on Jesus.
 - a. We're told to live our lives "looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus" (Amp), and to consider or contemplate Him so that we won't grow weary in our minds. Heb 12:1-3
 - b. Based on Jesus' parable of the two houses in the storm, we can presume that if we hear this Word from God and put it into practice (or focus on Jesus), we'll survive life's storms.
 1. But how do we focus on Jesus? Do we have to live with a mental picture of Jesus constantly in our head. Must every thought we have must be about God or have God in it?
 2. No. To focus on Jesus means to put your mental attention on the Word of God and consider your circumstances in terms of what God says rather than what you see and feel.
 - c. In this lesson we're going to talk some more about what it means to focus our minds on Jesus.
- B. The number one way we look at, focus on, and consider Jesus is through the Bible. The Living Word (the Lord Jesus) is revealed through the written Word (the Bible). To focus on Jesus means to consider what you see around you in terms of what God says in His written Word.
1. Col 3:2--The apostle Paul, a man who himself was unmoved by life's hardships, wrote that Christians must set our minds on things above. Paul himself said he dealt with life by mentally considering things he couldn't see (II Cor 4:18). Paul's statements are simply another way of saying: Focus on Jesus.
 - a. When we read all of Paul's writings we find what he meant by his statements. To focus on Jesus, to set your mind on things above, to mentally consider things you can't see means:
 1. Live with the awareness that there is more to life than this present moment and more to your life than just this lifetime. In other words, keep things in perspective. No one in Heaven is crying about what they had to deal with in this life.
 2. Live with the awareness that there is more to your situation than what you see and feel in this moment. No matter what you see and feel, Almighty God is perfectly present with you in the midst of your circumstance to help you. He will get you through until He gets you out.
 3. Live with the awareness that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God. No matter how it looks or feels, the resources available to you are greater than what you are facing.
 - b. Paul was actually talking about developing a perspective on life that is consistent with the way things really are according to God. His Word, the Bible, shows us reality as it truly is.
 - c. None of us naturally sees things the way God sees them (lessons for another day). This perspective must develop in us through regular Bible reading and good teaching. That's what renewing the mind is all about. Rom 12:2
 2. Even when we develop such a perspective, there are constant challenges that make it look and feel as though what God says is not so. Therefore, we must learn to recognize and deal with distractions that take our focus off of Jesus (or the way things really are according to God).

- a. Mark 4:14-20--Jesus told another parable where He revealed that in between His first and second coming His kingdom would advance through the preaching of His Word. Jesus made it clear that there will be challenges to the Word of God that can make it unfruitful in our lives if we don't know how to deal with them: the devil; persecution, affliction, and tribulation; the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and lust for other things.
- b. We could do an entire series on each of these distractions, but for now, consider one point. The devil comes to steal the Word of God from us. Mark 4:15
 1. He seeks to distract us, to get us to look away from Christ (or take our mental attention off of the way things really are according to God's Word) and thereby discourage us and undermine our faith and confidence in God.
 2. His efforts can be particularly effective when we are in a hard place because, in those times, we are more vulnerable emotionally, and sometimes even physically.
3. Paul was well aware that believers can be moved in their minds by the efforts of the devil. We see this in a statement he made to Christians living in the city of Corinth, Greece. II Cor 11:3
 - a. There's more in Paul's words than we can discuss now, but notice that he was concerned that their minds were being affected and that they would be corrupted from the simplicity in Christ.
 1. Corrupted means to ruin, to spoil, to bring to a worse state. Simplicity comes from a word that means single, singleness. It denotes simplicity, sincerity.
 2. II Cor 11:3--But I fear lest as Eve was beguiled by the craftiness of the serpent, so your imagination should be corrupted, and you should be seduced from your single-minded faithfulness to Christ. (Conybeare); But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (RSV).
 3. Notice, Paul said that he was concerned that what happened to Eve would happen to them. The Genesis record reveals that the devil stole God's Word from Eve and distracted her from her single-minded faithfulness to God.
 - b. When we go back to Genesis 3:1-6 we see how the devil did it. He worked on her mind and undermined her confidence in God by lying to her. Eve entertained the lies and became persuaded that they were true. Then she acted on them.
 1. Gen 3:1--The serpent misquoted God's Word to Eve and subtly flung an accusation at God with his misquote: Can it really be (Amp); did God really say (NLT) that you can't eat from any of the garden trees? God's instruction to Adam and Eve was that they could eat from every tree but one (Gen 2:16,17).
 2. Gen 3:2,3--Eve also misquoted God in her replay to the serpent: We can eat from every tree but one. We can't even touch that tree or we'll die. However, God said nothing like that.
 3. Gen 3:4,5--Then the devil challenged God's Word directly, declaring it to be untrue. He told Eve that, not only would they not die, eating from the tree was beneficial, further undermining God's character to her.
 4. Gen 3:6--Instead of looking to God (focusing her attention on His Word) Eve looked at the tree and considered what the devil said it would do for her. She engaged with the thoughts.
 - c. The devil lied to Eve about herself and her circumstances. He told her: You're lacking something and it's God's fault. And he lied to her about the consequences of disobeying God: Nothing bad will happen. In fact, you'll gain by doing it.
 - d. There's nothing new under the sun. The devil still uses these same lies to steal the Word of God. He lies to our minds about ourselves, our circumstances, and the consequences of disobedience. And if we engage with his lies, we'll end up like Eve.
4. Many sincere Christians misunderstand how the devil works. We attribute life's troubles to the devil and try to rebuke him out of our flat tire and our broken washing machine. The Bible never tells us to beware of the devil's power. Rather, it warns us to beware of his mental strategies or wiles. Eph 6:11
 - a. The devil comes to steal God's Word. He can't take it from us. He must persuade us to give it up.

He attempts to influence our behavior by presenting us with thoughts which he hopes we'll act on.

b. If your perception of reality never changes or you don't learn to control your mind and quit engaging with certain thoughts, the devil's work is much easier.

1. This is why renewing the mind is so vital, so that we can distinguish lies from the truth. Paul told Christians to put on the armor of God that we can stand up against the wiles of the devil.
2. Eph 6:13--He repeated himself when he wrote: take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand in the day of trouble (evil day). God's Word (the truth) is our armor against the lies of the devil. "His faithful promises are your armor and protection." (Ps 91:4, NLB)

5. The devil has to talk us out of the Word of God. He takes advantage of what we don't know and he tries to twist what we do know. He seeks to distract us, to get us to look away from Christ and think about things based only on what we see and feel in the moment. Consider one example.

a. The devil used Peter to try to steal the word of God from Jesus. Remember, Jesus (in His humanity) was tempted in all points that we are. Heb 4:15

1. Jesus came to earth to die and fulfill the Word of God (Old Testament prophecies concerning His death, burial, and resurrection). This was an attempt by Satan to undermine Jesus' confidence in God's Word through Peter, one of Jesus' closest followers.

2. Matt 16:21-23--When Jesus informed His disciples that He would be killed by the religious leaders in Jerusalem, Peter rebuked Him. However, Jesus recognized that the thought originated with the devil, not Peter. Jesus resisted rather than engaged the thought.

b. v23--Notice, Jesus called Satan an offense. Offense is the Greek word *skandalon*. It means the trigger of a trap on which the is placed. When the bait is touched by an animal, the trigger springs, causing the trap to close on the animal.

1. The devil offered Jesus bait through Peter who accepted had thoughts he should have rejected. Although Peter didn't yet understand the plan of God and what the Lord was going to do through Jesus' death, he should have kept his focus on Jesus and trusted Him.

2. Notice Jesus' assessment of the thought process involved in this incident: For you look at things, not as God does, but as man does. (20th Cent)

C. Life's challenges generate thoughts in our mind. That's perfectly normal. But you must make the effort to put your attention back on the way things really are according to God and not let the thoughts distract you.

1. When thoughts go through our mind we tend pick them up and begin to feed on them. But, according to Jesus there are certain thoughts we shouldn't engage with.

a. In Matt 6:31, in the context of not worrying about where the necessities of life will come from, Jesus said: Take no thought saying. In His example He includes this question: Where am I going to get food and clothing? That is a reasonable question in the face of lack.

1. But, if you engage with it, you must know the correct answer: My Father will help me. I matter more than a bird or flower. Matt 6:26
2. We have a tendency to engage and answer questions based only on what we see and feel, and then we let that thought and the incorrect answer lead to other, even more dire, thoughts.

b. In addition to thoughts, life's challenges generate emotions that make us more vulnerable to the devil's lies. We must know the truth so that we can recognize the lies and deal with them before they move us to act -- even when it's hard and it feels more natural to feed on the thoughts.

1. If not dealt with, these mental and emotional distractions can affect your faith and confidence in God and ultimately move you to act in ways that are contrary to Him.

A. No sincere Christian wakes up one morning and declares: Today, I'm going to commit adultery or embezzle money from my employer or reject God and become an atheist.

B. Instead, they allow their attention to slowly be distracted from God's Word by feelings, thoughts, and circumstances to the point where those choices seem reasonable.

2. To stand the storms of life and remain unmoved, you must get control of your mind. That means you must exercise self-control in your mind and refuse to engage with certain thoughts.
 2. All of us have faith-undermining thoughts from time to time which we must recognize and reject. Remember, there's nothing new under the sun. We all get tempted by such thoughts. Consider these examples of the kinds of thoughts that arise in the face of trouble.
 - a. God doesn't care about me. It's interesting to note that when the disciples encountered a deadly storm on Sea of Galilee and Jesus' friend Martha felt she was being taken advantage of by her sister, the first words they uttered to Jesus were: don't you care? Mark 4:38; Luke 10:40
 1. Fallen flesh and unrenewed minds (with the help of lies from the devil) are quick to accuse God of wrong doing because of how we feel in the moment.
 2. Not only is this statement inaccurate, it undermines your trust in God and makes it easier to justify ungodly behavior. You need to shut these kinds of thoughts down immediately.
 - b. If you had been here. When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, and Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus' sisters said: If you had been here, our brother would not have died. John 11:21
 1. Notice that this is another accusation against God. God is never behind life's trials. They are part of life in a fallen world. God is always at work for good. (lessons for another day).
 2. The point is that fallen flesh and unrenewed minds (with the help of the devil) are quick to accuse God. You must become aware of this and shut it down immediately.
 - c. Everything is against me. Jacob lost his favorite son Joseph when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. Through a long series of events Joseph ended up in command of a food distribution program in Egypt during a time of severe famine. Jacob sent his surviving sons (except for Benjamin) to Egypt for food. They returned to their father with food, but also with the news that brother Simeon was in jail in Egypt and would not be released until Benjamin was taken to Egypt.
 1. Jacob's reaction to their report was: Everything is against me (Gen 42:36). But, as we know (because we know how the story ended) this was not the case. Jacob was about to be reunited with his son Joseph and would not lose Benjamin or Simeon.
 2. But, the devil didn't have to do anything to discourage Jacob or his sons. Jacob took care that.
 3. Don't do the devil's work for him. Refuse to accuse God or discourage yourself no matter how things look or how you feel. Control your mind. There's always more information available than what you see and feel: God with you and for you, working behind the scenes, to bring genuine good out of bad.
- D. Conclusion: Jesus said that the one who hears and puts into practice God's Word will stand the storms of life. God's Word to us is: Be ye thankful. Col 3:15; I Thess 5:18
1. Put your focus back on Jesus by thanking Him for the way things really are according to His Word. Thank Him that there's more to your situation than what you see and feel in the moment.
 2. Put things in perspective. Thank God that you have a future and a hope, and that in the life ahead, the troubles you're experiencing will seem like nothing. You will stand the storm More next week!!