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SATAN'S TACTICS

HOW TO DESTROY A GROWING CHURCH

MINI BOOK

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In his famous book entitled, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis tells a cautionary tale about an old devil training a younger, less-experienced devil, in the art of tempting human beings into sin. The book is a series of letters between these two where the senior demon provides all kinds of good advice on how to seduce and trap people with their own vices and weaknesses.

There is an especially insightful chapter on how to do this with those people who claim to be extremely religious. The faithful, he says, require a different approach, but they can be manipulated if one knows the right strings to pull.

I recommend the book because it is a classic study on the weakness of human nature, and quite humorous for a work on such a serious subject. Aside from the humor, the main lesson that I drew from Lewis' book was that there are powerful, albeit unseen, evil forces at work in the world and in our lives.

I really do believe that Satan and his evil ones are attempting to destroy our souls, but not because C.S. Lewis wrote a book. I believe that the devil is real because the Bible speaks of him and his tactics to harm the church.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
- Ephesians 6:10-12

Here Paul mentions powers, principalities, and forces. He's talking about real things that exist with the only goal to destroy us as believers. In another New Testament book, Peter says,

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
- I Peter 5:8

Someone to devour and destroy. Can you imagine what harm a lion could do to a human being? This is the imagery that Peter is using to warn Christians of the possible destruction that the devil can cause in their lives.

God warns us that Satan exists, is powerful, and actively seeks to destroy us as individuals or disrupt what we do in the name of Christ. One of the more successful schemes that Satan pursues is the destruction of the local church. After all, why put a lot of effort into seducing one member at a time when you can destroy the entire group in a single blow?

This tactic is especially true with growing churches because these are the ones that present the greatest threat to his power over a community and a nation. Let's face

it, who else is charged with the task of responding to the lies of the devil that constantly infiltrate our society? Paul, the Apostle says,

but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

- I Timothy 3:15

HOW TO DESTROY A GROWING CHURCH

The surest way to destroy any congregation, especially a growing one, would be to follow a plan of attack that would include three basic steps.

Step #1 – Sow Division

The best way to stop a charging army is to make it begin fighting itself.

Divide and conquer is not only a slogan, it's a pretty effective way to defeat the forward momentum of any successful enterprise, whether it be a political party, a football team, a business, or a congregation of the Lord's church.

SATAN USES PRIDE TO DIVIDE

Pride moves people to want honor and prestige for themselves and in doing so often alienate others in the group. This is true whether it is a church or family group, business or bowling team. Pride creates sensitive feelings that are easily hurt. Pride sees only the mistakes and faults of others, without bothering to accurately estimate self. Of course, if only one person in the

church is proud this may not threaten the unity of the entire body.

However, when several proud people begin to compete for position and power, polarization occurs and with polarization comes division, and with division comes destruction.

SATAN USES FALSE ACCUSATIONS TO DIVIDE

The Bible says that Satan is the accuser of the brethren, accusing them of their sins night and day before God (Revelation 12:10). Thankfully, we have Christ at the right hand of God, continually defending and purifying us with His blood so that none of the accusations can lead to our condemnation (Romans 8:1).

When Satan plants the seeds of accusation against someone in the hearts of the

brethren, the results are often anger and resentment, instead of defense and forgiveness. He whispers half-truths and gossip through the sinful lips of others and soon we begin to harbor anger, even hatred for our brethren, and for things we think that they have said or thought about us. Imagine, allowing our emotions to be guided by what we think somebody is thinking? Paul the Apostle warned of this tactic and result in Galatians 5:15, when he said,

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The church at Corinth was a dynamic congregation. Its members were blessed with powerful spiritual gifts and they were flourishing in the middle of a completely

pagan society. However, its growth and momentum stopped because in-fighting broke out among its leaders who lusted after the power and honor that come with leadership. If Satan can sow division among those who were directly evangelized and taught by a living apostle, and blessed with miraculous gifts, I believe that it is a small matter for him to divide and conquer us as well, who have received neither of these advantages.

Step #2 – Create Diversions

I believe that the number one reason people don't become Christians or become unfaithful as Christians is that they are distracted. They are simply not paying attention. It's as if Satan infects them with spiritual ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). For people who are not Christians, the

diversions are as old as sin. The Apostle John summarizes these in I John 2:16.

1. **The lust of the flesh** - sensual pleasure, both legitimate and illegitimate.
2. **The lust of the eyes** - the bottomless desire to have more; more money, more sex, more power, more toys; the never-ending desire for more, bigger, better, stronger, faster, higher, lower, whatever.
3. **The pride of life** - satisfaction derived from possessing and controlling physical things.

And so, the unsaved person remains unsaved, largely due to the fact that his attention is constantly focused on these

diversions and not on seeking God and His will. If this busy person is ever saved, it's because somehow, someone has broken through this quest for more and has shared the gospel with him, and he has taken the time to consider it.

For people in the church who have found God in Christ the diversions that Satan uses in addition to these or when these things lose their power to enthrall, are more subtle in nature, but just as devastating to one's soul. In order to create diversion among believers, Satan lures the church into the trap of majoring in minors. For example, church members spend more time worrying about decorating the building than filling the building with people to hear the gospel. They worry about having money to meet next month's obligations and ignore this month's

responsibilities to serve those in need and teach God's word. The minors have to be taken care of, of course, but they are not the majors. People get side-tracked into debating who's in charge or whose way we are going to use to do certain things, instead of simply getting the job done.

Another diversionary tactic is to lead people to search for spiritual satisfaction outside of Christ and His church. People wanting a spiritual high, for example, will read all kinds of books on "spirituality" and experiment with other religious practices or philosophies. In other words, they will go elsewhere, lured by the false promise of a unique spiritual experience, when all they really need for genuine holiness and joy is available to them through God's word and body (II Peter 1:3-4).

People become distracted by the sales pitch for a free spiritual high usually produced by emotional manipulation or the discovery of some "spiritual secret", and while distracted neglect the only true way to spiritual maturity which is through knowledge of God's word and loving service to others in the name of Christ. There's no secret to this. Sincere worship along with personal sanctification by dealing with our sins on a daily basis, these are the spiritual things that please God and draw us nearer to Him. Have I mentioned anything here that sounds like a mystery?

When people in the church, especially those charged with training and leading others, don't focus on true biblical ministry, the church wastes its spiritual energy. In order to sustain growth, the church needs to stay focused on the

mission plan given to it by Christ in the Bible, and not divert from it or be led away from it by Satan and his tactics. The New Testament mission plan is very simple. First, we're to preach the gospel to the lost in our community first, to our nation and to the world as opportunity and resources permit us to do so.

Second, we are to teach those who are converted to obey all the words of Christ our Lord, and train them how to obey these things. Third, we are to prepare the church for Christ's return by maintaining its unity and its purity of life and doctrine (Matthew 28:18-20). That's it! That's the mission! Easy to say, not always easy to do. But in these things we have all that we need to be doing. These things equip us for spiritual life here and prepare us for eternal life in another dimension which we call heaven,

and Satan will do anything and everything to divert our attention and stop us from carrying out these things.

Step #3 – Pile on Discouragement

Just when we think everything in life and in the church is going smoothly, the roof caves in. People we love become sick or die. Brethren we trust, disappoint us. Marriages that look solid, begin to fall apart. There is less time and more work. The needs begin to outstrip the resources. The good die young and the ones we look to for leadership fail us badly. We become spiritually tired and depressed.

And when we think it just couldn't get any more difficult, news comes of more trouble that we did not expect.

Much like in Job's situation, God doesn't allow Satan to kill us, but He permits the evil one to pour out all kinds of trials on our lives and the church until the thought of quitting seems like an easy way to be free and happy again. When spiritual burdens become wearisome, we need to ask ourselves only one question: who is responsible for these things? We won't get very far if we try to blame God, because we know that He sends the good in our lives and provides the strength to cope with the bad. The obvious answer soon appears. Sin and ignorance of Satan's lies, these are the things that cause failure, division, and the sorrows that bring our discouragement. The devil used this tactic on the Apostles in the early church, bombarding them with persecution, rejection and isolation from their families, their communities, and even their government. They resisted the

temptation to give up, however, because they knew the source of these attacks and had an abiding hope for a better life in a better place.

I recently attended a Bible class in another congregation while traveling. The teacher asked the group to name the greatest danger that Americans faced. Some answered that the potential for war with other nations or changes in the climate were immediate threats. My own response was that the greatest danger to America was worldliness. Our constant twenty-four hour, seven-day-a-week consumption of the world that seduces us with non-stop marketing and advertising to buy this, do that, go there, and look at this. The constant stream of ten ways to do this, five top rated cars, or this is what was so and so was wearing to the awards show, etc.

Worldliness is the greatest danger we face because we consume it from morning to night. Every once in a while, on Wednesday night for an hour or Sunday morning for an hour or two, we take a break to feed on spiritual things, the things that are true and real. But the other hundreds of hours in the week we consume worldliness at an ever-increasing rate and quantity. This is what dooms non-believers, and threatens Christians.

The danger in the first century was not overwhelming worldliness. Their danger was actually being persecuted, dragged off to jail, and killed. That was the immediate danger that Christians faced then, and yet, they resisted. If our greatest threat today was that of being arrested or the government shutting down our church buildings and throwing our ministers into

prison, I would be much less worried for the church because it thrives under this kind of persecution, and I believe the devil knows this. Worldliness, however, is insipid and quietly deadly because its victims are usually not aware of their precarious position and slow spiritual demise. There is not even a thought of resistance because they are too busy consuming what is destroying them.

Remember that the Bible promises that those who turn away from sin to Christ will suffer for that decision (I Peter 4:12-13). Let us not, therefore, be surprised or defeated by a tactic that is so clearly described in advance by the Lord when He tells us, through Peter, that Satan is like a roaring lion ready to destroy us.

In I Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul tells the church that Jesus gave us the communion as a way of proclaiming His death and resurrection until He comes again. What He doesn't say but is understood here by every Christian who takes it each week, is that the communion also points to our own resurrection that will take place when He returns. Jesus said,

This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.
- John 6:39

My message in this book is about our resurrection which will take place at the end of the world when Jesus comes again for the judgment of the world (Matthew 25 and II Thessalonians 4).

You see, all of Satan's tactics used to destroy the church are really an attempt to prevent the glorious resurrection promised to all believers. Satan knows that he cannot destroy the church itself.

Jesus has already barred him from doing this when He said,

...upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

- Matthew 16:18

We know, therefore, that Satan cannot destroy the church as a whole. However, he can use his schemes to shake out individual members from the church and destroy their own personal souls, denying them the eternal reward that they are anticipating. He will divide a brother or a sister from

one another and isolate them for further attack. He will distract them with the worldly pleasures that he controls. He will discourage them with the lie that it isn't worth being faithful until the end. Unfortunately, some, not all, will become victims of his treachery and fall away, and lose their salvation as a consequence. Satan can't win the war, but he is determined to destroy as many as possible before Jesus returns. This is why the attacks are fierce and unrelenting.

One last word to those who have not yet obeyed the gospel in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:36-38). Realize that you have been deceived by the most seductive tactic of all, procrastination. Putting things off enables a person to believe, agree, and even decide to do what God commands...in a little while. Satan will always provide one

hundred reasons not to be baptized today, not to repent today, not to be restored today, not to deal with your sins today. One hundred reasons why doing so tomorrow is as good as doing so today. But today may be the day the Lord calls you to judgement, and losing one's soul to procrastination is such an easy win for the evil one because he has not promised or provided anything in return for destroying your eternal life.

Hopefully, you are now better armed with the foreknowledge of Satan's tactics. Be careful, therefore, not to succumb. In the meantime, let those who are Christ's followers stay focused on the mission to evangelize, teach, and prepare for the Lord's return which will be experienced through death or seeing Him appear at the end of the world.

Either way will lead the faithful to a resurrection and life with God in heaven forever.

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