

DEVIL-TALK

Ephesians 6:10-17 (NASB)
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The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien is the story of an imaginary world called Middle Earth which comes under attack by an overwhelming evil spiritual power. One region of Middle Earth is called Rohan where the king, Theoden, has fallen under the spiritual power of evil without even leaving his throne room. His closest advisor, the oily Grima, has sold out to the evil power and has been whispering poisonous lies to the king for a long time. Theoden does nothing but sit on his throne, looking like a dead man. He is so under the domination of spiritual evil that he can hardly move or speak, and he believes everything his traitorous advisor tells him. His kingdom is under attack by orcs yet he does nothing--precisely what the enemy wants.

When Theodred, the king's own son and heir to the throne, is slain in battle against the orcs the king will not go to him to grieve. Then a scene unfolds with Theoden's niece, Eowyn, weeping over Theodred in a side chamber of the king's hall. Grima, also called Wormtongue, enters and begins to weave his spell of lies over her. He sees her fear of being alone and begins to work it in: "Oh, but you are alone!" he intones. He speaks of how she lies in her bed at night, awake and alone in the dark, grappling with nameless terrors.

"Leave me alone, snake!" she cries out. But she does not leave, and he continues to talk, relentlessly weaving lie upon lie. He cradles her face in his hand tenderly, and she does not look away as he draws her back in with his words. Her resolve seems to be evaporating under the pressure of her heart need for comfort and protection. When it seems that Eowyn will relinquish her will into Wormtongue's hand she suddenly snaps out of his spell. "Your words are poison!" she cries out and storms out of the room.

1. THE PHENOMENON OF DEVIL-TALK

Have you ever experienced the bizarre and confusing phenomenon of devil-talk? I have. Several years ago I attended our annual gathering of pastors, missionaries, and church delegates. I love these meetings partly because I get to compare notes with others who are in the same battles as I am--shop-talk, if you will. There is also a rich opportunity for mutual encouragement and guidance. I often discover that God has planned divine appointments for me to intervene in someone's life. Many people come to our Council looking for a touch from God, and I have been happy to be his instrument on many occasions, mostly because I am explicitly looking for him to use me that way. That year I also had an appointment for spiritual battle for which I was not prepared.

While in the midst of shop talk I had an experience which I hope never to repeat. I was talking to another pastor about a particular aspect of ministry. He made a remark about how he would handle the issue. At that very moment, I felt a heavy weight of condemnation land upon me that was shockingly powerful. My emotional nature sank into a pit and my thoughts became

morbid. The pathetic thing is that I walked around like that for almost a full day. My mind was distracted with technical matters concerning the work of my committee and I did not stop to take a spiritual inventory. When finally I sought the Lord about it, he guided me to realize that I had been lied to. I had been listening to devil-talk without knowing it and without rebuking it.

2. PETER AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DEVIL-TALK

The Scripture which explains my experience is found in Matthew 16:21-23: **"From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.'** But He turned and said to Peter, **'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'"**

Let's analyze this from the standpoint of Peter for a moment. He has just heard that Jesus will have to undergo crucifixion. Out of love and concern for his master, Peter impulsively blurts out a mostly innocent statement: "Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And for his expression of concern, he hears a stinging rebuke from Jesus, directed partly to Peter and partly to the Devil.

Now let's look at it from the standpoint of Jesus in his humanity. He's just gotten done explaining a matter which involves the greatest personal sorrow for him. Later it would be said that he suffered so much in anticipation that he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane. At that moment, one of his closest friends speaks a word of concern. Jesus' perception was that the Devil himself was using the opportunity of Peter's words to make a poisonous statement of his own, and Jesus rebuked the devil-talk immediately: **"Get behind me, Satan!"** Peter merely said: "Lord, I hope you don't mean you have to die!" and Jesus heard something like: "You don't need to go to the cross! Why should anyone go through such suffering? What a waste! Just skip it!"

Remember that Jesus had spent forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, during which time the Devil visited him to deliver three enticements which, if Jesus succumbed to them, would negate his mission to atone for the sins of the world. The final one was a temptation to skip the cross and go immediately to rule and reign over the earth by worshiping the Devil (Mat. 4:1-11). In Jesus' later confrontation through the well-meant but ill-spoken concern of Peter, the Devil took the opportunity to speak yet another poisonous word to him.

3. THE DEVIL WANTS TO POISON OUR SOULS

The Devil often comes to us at the point of our vulnerability, our woundedness, our pain, doubt, and fear to inject poison from the pit of hell. I discovered that this is what happened to me in my discussion with my pastor friend. He had made a perfectly valid comment about effectiveness in ministry, and I heard devil-talk instead. More accurately, I did not hear any words other than the ones my friend spoke, but my soul responded as if I had heard the words:

"You have dedicated your life to communicating the word of God, and it has all been a waste. All your efforts are useless. You are a pathetic failure, and nothing you do can change that."

My sense of condemnation was so intense at that moment that I had a visceral response. My blood pressure seemed to drop and my pores opened. Somehow I failed to recognize what was happening and I failed to bring to mind the relevant scripture: "**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Rom. 8:1). As Martin Luther wrote about Satan in the hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, "one little word shall fell him." In my distraction, I waited almost a full day before using that little word in an act of spiritual warfare praying which relieved me instantaneously of my false burden of condemnation.

I have seen this happen to others many times in my ministry. I was conducting a Bible study in a home when the subject of pleasing God came up. Two people mentioned that at times they were stricken with fear that they might not be saved. Satan had identified their particular woundedness and punched it hard. If we were to put that condemnation into words, it would be something like: "You're dirt! You are worthless and unworthy, and God would not bother to save you." Or perhaps it would be: "No matter how hard you try to be a Christian, you will inevitably get it wrong and go to hell!" Again, they probably heard no words, but the effect on their souls was the same as if they had been spoken.

I remember a man who had been away from God and the church for years, and when his father died he began to move back toward the Lord. As I was preaching one day I quoted Genesis 9:6 and said that if capital punishment for murder was the best way for Israel to preserve the sanctity of human life, it would be the best way for America as well. I watched his countenance fall like a stone, he put his head down for the rest of the sermon, and I have never seen him again. I am speculating, but I think he heard devil-talk that day. Maybe he heard: "Those Christians are hard-hearted, heavy-handed people. You could never be happy associating with them!"

I remember a woman at our Annual Council in Pittsburgh who came to the microphone trembling with emotion during a debate about women's ministries. She began to pour her feelings through the huge PA system. Her thoughts were generally on the subject, but there was so much anger and frustration that it was hard to figure out what she was trying to say. When she was done, we all sat there stunned. She seemed to be responding to something no one had said. My theory is that in the midst of the general discussion, she heard devil-talk which may have been like this: "These people have no idea how much your service to Christ has cost you. They have no appreciation for what you are doing. As far as they are concerned, you don't count at all." On the contrary, the first thing I heard after she finished blasting us was a low voice near me which said: "Someone needs to hug that sister and tell her how much we love and appreciate her."

Have you heard the voice of the Devil in your life? Things like: "You will never be loved until you are beautiful. Just stick your finger down your throat and get rid of all that food that keeps you from being beautiful." Or, "You don't have much, but you can always trade your body for what you feel you need." Perhaps you have heard: "You will never get ahead at work. It's a prison house. You deserve to feel better. Alcohol is your answer." Or, "Pornography is your

answer." Have you heard: "This parenting is killing you. You have credit cards. Why not use them? It will make you feel better." Or perhaps: "You're miserable and there's nothing you can do about it. Some little cuts in your arm--just a little bleeding--will make you feel better. Besides, your friends are doing it." And here's one of the most popular poison injections of our day: "Getting close to people of the opposite sex is just too painful. Lots of people are going for people of the same sex now."

4. IDENTIFYING THE ENEMY

Has this ever happened to you? If it hasn't, it probably will. Ephesians 6:10-17 gives us Paul the Apostle's training lesson on spiritual warfare. While we cannot treat the subject in depth in this study, even an overview can give us critical guidance for responding to devil-talk and the truckload of condemnation which the Devil manages to dump on us from time to time.

The first thing is that when we are under the pile spiritually, we must relinquish any idea of fighting in mere human strength: "**Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might**" (Eph. 6:10). When our buttons have been pushed, we want to go to battle. Doing so in merely human wisdom and strength results in guaranteed defeat. Honestly, during an acrimonious debate at our Annual Council one year I got so frustrated that I shook the folding chair in front of me. What I did not realize was that the chairs were connected together, so I ended up shaking a nice couple sitting in that row. The Lord convicted me of my fleshliness immediately and I apologized to the delegates I had vibrated. They forgave me and said: "That's all right. We're frustrated, too." But Paul's point is that our human responses do no good. Spiritual battles can only ever be won in the strength of God's might, which means that we must walk in human weakness, submitting to him at every point.

One of the Satan's favorite purposes for devil-talk is to divide the church against itself. Just as Peter was the carrier for a thought from the pit of hell, any one of us could fall into the same thing. Jesus emphatically answered the spiritual challenge, but he did not turn against Peter. Division in the church was not the outcome of Jesus' encounter with devil-talk. He didn't say to himself: "That Peter is my enemy now--I'll never let him near me again!" No, Paul explained the mystery of spiritual battle this way: "**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**" (Eph. 6:12).

I want to appeal to you all to see that breaking relationships--people connections--in the middle of a spiritual battle is the very definition of defeat! Satan tries to get us to identify the other humans as the enemy, when the real enemy is found in the spirit realm--specifically, the demonic. This is not merely poetic language! Jesus' command to us was to love the humans: the body of Christ first as members of our spiritual family, folks who do not yet know Christ, and then even our enemies! When the condemnation of devil-talk lands upon us like a ton of bricks, our perspective is distorted, our emotions are on edge, and we must resist the temptation to identify the first thing we see in our environment as the cause of the problem.

5. HOW TO FIGHT DEVIL-TALK

So how do we fight at that moment? Paul gives a complete lesson in Ephesians 6 on the tactics of spiritual battle. Key to our success is that we **"Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil"** (6:11). This scheme of making the uncondemned person feel condemned can only be resisted by wearing spiritual armor. And while we will not treat the whole armor in this study, we can learn the effective response to devil-talk by looking briefly at several items.

At the very moment when the feeling of condemnation lands we need to **"...tak[e] up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one"** (6:16). Have you ever thought of yourself as the target for the Devil's flaming missiles? I know we didn't put that in the evangelistic tract: "Hey, and another benefit of being saved is that you get fired upon all the time by the Prince of Darkness!" Actually, it is no threat as long as we take up the shield of our faith. As our emotions are sinking down our faith parries the thrust of the flaming dart by trusting God as an act of the will: "I refuse to believe this feeling of condemnation because God loves me! I refuse to identify the humans as my enemy, because God commands me otherwise! I refuse to make any decision based on this emotion, but I will decide everything based upon the truth of God, my Rock and my Redeemer!"

Then we take **"...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (6:17b). When the foul darkness of deceitful condemnation lands on you, say: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, so this feeling is a lie!" For every type of flaming missile, there is a Scripture which will knock it down. If we are willing to put on the spiritual armor of God, we will win in spiritual battle. When devil-talk assails your spiritual composure, lift the sword of the Spirit!

James advises: **"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"** (James 4:7). There is no "maybe" in this solution. It is the birthright of every child of God to have the authority to resolve every attack of the Evil One victoriously in Christ. The only question is: Are you ready for battle? I pray that you are, because the alternative is to have the comfort, peace, and joy of the Lord stolen from us by the Prince of the Power of the Air, who has no right to do so.

CONCLUSION

The king of Rohan did not realize that he was being poisoned by devil-talk, and because it came from a trusted advisor he did not resist. His outward death-like physical debility was a picture of his inner spiritual state. Is that happening to you? Eowyn, on the other hand, came very close to succumbing but gathered her wits and rejected the seduction before it was too late. We should shout the same things when devil-talk comes to us: "Leave me alone, snake! Your words are poison!"

Attacks may even come through someone we trust. Confront the lies in the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ! Lift the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God! There is no victory over the attacks of the Evil One for the passive, those ignorant of the truth of the word of God, or those who trust human strength and wisdom. The first step to spiritual freedom is to turn from the sins which enslave you and receive Christ as your Lord and Savior.

[clip: LOTR II, Extended Edition, Chapter 20, 1:12:35, end when Eowyn storms out at 1:15:20]