

Three Tips for Spiritual Warfare

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What—there's a war going on? Maybe I'd rather not know about it. But if it's there, ignorance is not bliss. My observation is that spiritual warfare often starts with a pull toward obsession, meaning that something has caught my attention in a negative way, and I am grappling with it but finding the negative far too powerful to control. Thoughts about how another is wrong and my plans on how to right that person flood in: anger probably rises up, as well as justification for that anger.

At this point, one who takes condemnation and tries not to feel angry, gets pulled into self-preoccupation and a consciousness of guilt for not having only positive thoughts and upward faith from the onset of the temptation. Another scenario involves justification for anger and an endless court scene in one's mind, where your lawyer smashes all the arguments of the guilty opponent, thinking that argument will prevail, and the other person will see his or her error and change. The problem is that this scenario is endless and begins to drain away a focus on the Lord. Joy evaporates, and soon, instead of being for others, one moves into a single battle that subtly falls onto a flesh level, apart from a living sense of who Christ is and how we enjoy His life in us by faith.

Let's look first at the person who when tempted, immediately takes condemnation and tries not to feel negative. There's no hope for this outlook because the Bible tells us that we *will* be tempted, and this of *necessity* means that we experience a contrary pull to the upward pull of faith. Though

the Bible says that temptation is not sin, I' ve never known anyone who did not struggle with guilt over temptation while learning this. It seems like news just too good to be true—that we do not need to beat ourselves up over wanting to do something wrong. Not only that, it seems too good to be true that we do not have to try to change our feelings. In fact, we do not have to try to do anything: trying means that we still think that we can keep ourselves and do not need the Lord' *stotal* keeping.

Taking condemnation, as well as trying to change ourselves, hide the devil' s last footholds in us when we don' t see that we are only vessels *containing* Christ and not Christ Himself. Therefore, He must do all changing and keeping. If we still think that we can do these, then of course we will take condemnation, since of course we won' t be able to change ourselves or others, and we will blame ourselves for not being able to. Once we see that we' re not able to and that God never created us able to, then we' ll stop taking condemnation for what God never designed us to do in the first place.

So here we are—weak, human selves and meant to be! We rejoice in what we used to hate, counting as all joy our trials and temptations, which looks crazy to the world and to Christians who still think that they can change themselves or others.

Now let' s look at the scenario where one justifies anger or some other negative—entering into the never-ending court battle in the mind. Accusation and obsession begin to take over, and enjoyment of the Lord Himself in us and in others begins to disappear. Praise and thanksgiving drop off. All of life becomes a battle to prove ourselves right. We lose the

sense of where we end and others begin and do not give others space to fail if they determine to.

How can we know whether to intervene or not? The Lord does speak to us; Jesus says that His sheep hear His voice. So if we are willing to say nothing and do nothing, but only be still, then He will let us know if He wishes us to say or do anything, which means His saying and doing in us. What a shock I found that He very often has me say and do nothing! What a cost. However, when we enter into His rest this way, the obsession drops away, and we get on with the business that He *does* have for us.

Last, things regularly look impossible. That's God's way. He means for things to look impossible. That way, we focus on Him and seek wisdom. James tells us that wisdom is always available if we seek it with a single mind. Now we enter into a dance. I have learned the joy of at first hating the impossible, only to explode into joy that God is working in a way beyond all logic and reason in the appearance of things. Watching God work miracle after miracle becomes our ultimate thrill. And when He does it by our faith, nothing compares to that!