

Satan & Spiritual Warfare

It was just 75 years ago that a small book called *The Screwtape Letters* was published; that was in February of 1942, less than ten years later C.S. Lewis started to become known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. *The Screwtape Letters* was his first “claim to fame.”

You don't have to be a big fan of *The Screwtape Letters* to enjoy what I'm going to share. There is a lot of talk these days about “Spiritual Warfare” and an often quoted verse comes from Ephesians 6:12; which I will share from the New Living Translation (NLT): For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

I believe you can view this book as giving you insight into this “spiritual warfare.” Some have summarized *The Screwtape Letters* by saying it is like reading your enemy's mail that details what he thinks about you and is going to try to do to mess up your life.

Another familiar verse is John 10:10, that says (NIV84): The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. The thief in this passage is Satan and, of course, the last half of this verse is talking about Jesus who came to give us abundant life.

Speaking of this, you've heard it said that “Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Would it surprise you to learn that “The Devil hates you and has a terrible plan for you?! So, the challenge becomes how to figure out what the devil is trying to do to mess with you, and this will provide insight into how to defend yourself, essentially enabling you to combat him better.

That's where this little book enters the picture. In 31 letters that can be read in less than five minutes each, you find out how Screwtape, a senior devil, instructs another demon, a “junior tempter” in how to ruin someone's life.

Allow me to approach it from a slightly different angle. In life, it's been said “you should pick your battles” (some things are not worth your energy fighting). However, what do you do if “a battle picks you” so to speak? That's what going on around all of us. A war is raging, but most of the time we act as though this wasn't true, because we are caught up in this material world.

Being in a war, imagine (again) if you were able to get your hands on the secret plans of your enemy? Before all our advanced communications, either side of a conflict would often give their instructions by letter. So, think of *The Screwtape Letters* as having a copy of your enemy's strategy.

But wait a minute, how can a book written so many years ago be about you? That's the beauty of how well its written. Even though it's about another person you frequently see yourself within these pages. That's why the first printing of 2,000 copies sold before it went on sale and that first year it was reprinted eight times! Another thing to get out of the way: while this is a work of fiction, it contains so many truths you can learn from it. But I don't say that to take away the fun of reading it if you decide to. For again, it's written about another person, yet as you are thinking to yourself, how can that person be so silly to fall for those things, you get glimpses of your own life and start to think how it might work in your own life if you had your own personal demon that tried to "steal, kill and destroy" you.

One other bit of background (to repeat) to make sure you understand...Screwtape is the senior demon and the tempter-in-training is Wormwood. Screwtape's goal is to tell Wormwood how to make his patient's life miserable. Let me take a quick survey...raise your hand if you want a miserable life. I didn't ask if you're your life was miserable, but if you wanted it to be. Of course, none of you do!

You might even think of this book as if it were 101 Ways Demons Can Make Your Life Unhappy...but, wait...this IS meant to be a seriously funny book! How funny? Humorous enough for Marvel Comics to come out with their own edition in the 90's! So, at the risk of taking away some of the enjoyment out of the book, I'm going to share key truths found between the pages.

Remember first the devil is a liar and he's not going to walk up to you and try to convince you to do things his way to have a terrible life. He's main craft is deception. One of the first things that comes out in *The Screwtape Letters* is that he won't try to convince you of anything...Jargon is the devil's best ally, not argument. Truth is on God's side, but our enemy will have us focus merely on things being "practical" or "contemporary" or "conventional." (and other relative buzz words)

One of the biggest things we have difficulty with is keeping a proper perspective on life. When we are successful at doing this Lewis refers to it as "attending to universal issues" and not being so distracted by our own "immediate sense experiences." But, what usually happens is our enemy confuses us, trying to get

your focus on the temporal things and calling it “real life” without considering what is meant by “real.”

Now, remember this was written in the early 1940’s before TV was even an everyday experience in life. And Lewis wrote the following: “Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head.”

Friends we have so many more distractions in our life...the opportunity to be exposed to so many things or views that we find it hard not to buy into the idea that there is no absolute truth.

Related to this is what may seem like a strange idea: often its believed that devils try to put things in our minds, however, a stronger “weapon” for them is actually “keeping things out,” that is instead of putting things in our minds, they focus their effort on keeping things out of our mind.

When this is not possible, say, when you or I look to Lord to be our strength, he has to try “misdirection.” This is accomplished by shifting our attention away from God and onto ourselves. For example: “When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave.”

One of my favorite single letters in the book is number eleven. Here Lewis described four causes of laughter. They are Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy. Everyone likes to laugh, right? Well, maybe some of us more than others, because we’ve all meet those who are just way too serious. Some may think I am that way now, but there was a time when I was “so serious” that I thought it was wrong to read the funny papers (daily comics). In fact, I also didn’t think very much of fiction in general at that time. Part of what changed me was reading so many great fictional works by C.S. Lewis.

Back to the four causes of laughter: Joy. This is of course, what you might consider to be the highest and best form of laughter. Scripture, after all, commands us to have “the joy of the Lord,” correct? The truly joyful person is full of laughter. Keeping in mind the way the letters are written (from one demon to another), you’ll find it no surprise that demons don’t even understand joy. Why should they? For the core ingredient in joy is thankfulness! Also, worshipful music is music that is full of joy.

The next cause of laughter is fun. Screwtape tells Wormwood it “is closely related to Joy” that is a part of our “play instinct.” This might shock you, but according to Screwtape, Hell doesn’t have much use for it. However, there is a “but” attached to this belief. Fun can be something helpful to them if they can tempt us to have some type of fun when we should be doing something else. Here’s how he says it in the book: “(Fun) can sometimes be used, of course, to divert humans from something else which the Enemy (meaning God) would like them to be feeling or doing.”

I often think of the verse in Scripture that I believe relates to this: “to obey is better than sacrifice.” Here it’s addressing something different, but the principle applies: there can be times when a certain thing you or I do is not necessarily wrong in and of itself, but it might be wrong for us to be doing it at that time. Should I do some of my paper work from work before my wife gets home, or do the dishes?

Likewise, there are various “fun” things that aren’t sinful, but if the Lord is wanting you to be doing something else, then it might be “sinful” for you at that time.

The final two causes of laughter, the joke proper and flippancy are ones that holds much more promise for the devils. The first one, “the joke proper” is something that can effectively destroy meaningful shame. What type of “shame” is “meaningful” or important?

First let’s make sure it’s clear that shame is closely related to guilt and there are things you should feel guilty about and there are some things you don’t need to feel guilty about. For this I will put on my “mental health” hat. When you have done something shameful and you confess it and do what is in your power to make amends, then you no longer have to feel guilty for it. The devil wants to twist all this and have you not feel any shame at all for anything.

In *The Screwtape Letters* we find Lewis saying that Hell is “not thinking primarily of indecent or bawdy humor” when it speak of “the Joke Proper.” While it can be used in these ways, it is better used as follows: “If a man simply lets others pay for him, he is “mean”; if he boasts of it in a jocular manner ... he is no longer “mean” but a comical fellow. Mere cowardice is shameful; cowardice boasted of with humorous exaggerations and grotesque gestures can passed off as funny. Cruelty is shameful - unless the cruel man can represent it as a practical joke.”

The fourth and final cause of laughter is, as noted already, flippancy. We all know what flippancy is like when we experience it. Even without a dictionary definition that tell us it is “frivolously disrespectful, shallow, or lacking in seriousness” [Dictionary.com] we know we hardly ever, if ever, like it in others. That is, unless we see someone else being flippant to another, this is often find funny (when it shouldn't be).

One thing we rarely see is when we ourselves are being flippant towards another person. Here's what Screwtape says about it: “Among flippant people the Joke is always assumed to have been made. No one actually makes it; but every serious subject is discussed in a manner which implies that they have already found a ridiculous side to it.”

He also comments further: “If prolonged, the habit of Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armor-plating against the Enemy that I know, and it is quite free from the dangers inherent in the other sources of laughter. It is a thousand miles away from joy it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practice it.”

The next useful tidbit has to do with the topic of habits. But first I must give you a spoiler alert. Well, actually, I don't need to do that, but it may seem like I do... You see, when the book starts off the “patient” is not a Christian, but at the start of the second letter he has just become one. Our junior tempter now doesn't know what to do with this failure. But Screwtape tells him that there are plenty of things to be do that could still benefit Hell. He tells Wormwood that “all the habits of the patient...are still in our favour.” That is, once a person becomes a Christian, the devils can use previous habits to undermine or hinder a person.

In the another letter (#12) Screwtape instructs that later on in a Christian's life the bad habits that are were previously picked up can be used to their advantage to direct a person into choices that they don't realize are carrying them away from God (“the Enemy”).

How does this help us practically? For me, I'm challenged to examine my own life to look for patterns of behavior (habits) that I've developed either before I was a Christian or even after that the enemy of my soul could be using to harm my life. It also, interestingly enough, gives me some comfort in knowing why I might have a difficult time with some behavior. Comfort is probably not the correct word, I mean more of knowing I'm going to have a difficult time because this or that habit may have come from my environment growing up and while I'm responsible for

my own behavior, I can't take the blame for the influences in my life that were out of my control...so, what I'm saying is I can cut myself some slack -so to speak- and know that a certain area in my life is going to be difficult and instead of giving myself a hard time about having a certain bad habit, I can instead, focus on what can be done about it to change and not beat myself up for having it.

Half-a-dozen letters earlier (#6) Screwtape is providing instruction on how Wormwood can use "suspense and anxiety" to keep a person from receiving God's comfort. He says: "We want him to be in the maximum uncertainty, so that his mind will be filled with contradictory pictures of the future, every one of which arouses hope or fear."

Then commenting on what the Lord is wanting from a person, Screwtape observes he wants them "to be concerned with what they do" (an action) and Hell's purpose "is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them" (which produces a feeling).

To paint this picture a little clearer think of it in terms of submitting with patience to what is happening to you: "he should accept with patience the tribulation which has actually been dealt out to him—the present anxiety and suspense. It is about this that he is to say "Thy will be done", and for the daily task of bearing this that the daily bread will be provided. It is your business to see that the patient never thinks of the present fear as his appointed cross but only of the things he is afraid of."

Notice the plural "things," for it is so easy to let our mind wonder "to a dozen different and hypothetical fates" that could happen. When you do this, you essentially "tie God's hands" from being able to provide you with any peace. Something else the devils want to do is to prevent spiritual growth in our lives. Screwtape provides four interesting tricks they try, but I'm going to only mention two of them that are found in the third letter:

(1) "Keep his mind on the inner life. He thinks his conversion is something inside him and his attention is therefore chiefly turned at present to the states of his own mind—or rather to that very expurgated version of them which is all you should allow him to see. Encourage this. Keep his mind off the most elementary duties by directing it to the most advanced and spiritual ones.

(2) "It is, no doubt, impossible to prevent his praying for his mother, but we have means of rendering the prayers innocuous. Make sure that they are always very

“spiritual”, that he is always concerned with the state of her soul and never with her rheumatism.”

Next, we all know about how important it is to be humble, correct? How can such a virtue be twisted by the devils? This comes from the fourteenth letter: “Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is especially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, “By jove! I’m being humble”, and almost immediately pride - pride at his own humility - will appear.”

Then, later in the same letter (14th), he states: “You must therefore conceal from the patient the true end of Humility. Let him think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character. Some talents, I gather, he really has. Fix in his mind the idea that humility consists in trying to believe those talents to be less valuable than he believes them to be. No doubt they are in fact less valuable than he believes, but that is not the point.”

Another interesting aspect mentioned in the book is something called “the law of Undulation.” Undulation is a wavelike motion...up and down; or as Lewis puts it in Letter eight *The Screwtape Letters*: “the repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs (dips) and peaks”

Keeping this principle in mind Wormwood is told: “If you had watched your patient carefully you would have seen this undulation in every department of his life—his interest in his work, his affection for his friends, his physical appetites, all go up and down. As long as he lives on earth periods of emotional and bodily richness and liveliness will alternate with periods of numbness and poverty.” To me this is say we all naturally go through low periods in our life; we should expect this as the norm and not try to be “up” all the time.

C.S. Lewis shares two ideas that I would like to mention. In both he relates in a very straight-forward manner his views on devils. From the 1st: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”

In the 2nd: “There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a “perfect badness” opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left.

The proper question is whether I believe in devils. I do. That is to say, I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us. These we may call devils. They do not differ in nature from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Devil is the opposite of angel only as Bad Man is the opposite of Good Man. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael.”