

Guarding the Mind

By Leo Chan

The human mind is a very powerful place. Our attitudes, thoughts and beliefs shape the way we feel, the way we perceive reality, the words we speak and the way we act and respond. One of the key areas of spiritual attack is the mind. Gregory Boyd, author of *God At War*, writes:

the Satanic kingdom is ... heavily at work in trying to deceive believers and to pollute their minds with falsehood. Indeed, one of the primary areas of spiritual warfare, according to Paul, is the believer's mind ... The Christian's mind, for Paul, is a battlefield between the evil one who blinds and the Savior who brings light. (p. 278-279)

Clinton E. Arnold, author of *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, says:

Satan and his forces fiercely pursue their objective of promulgating all forms of evil in the world. This includes, above all, deceiving people and hindering them from grasping the truth about God's revelation of Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. (p. 22)

Can it be any clearer than this? The enemy is bent on bringing deception and falsehood into the lives of believers. However, Christians need not worry. There is hope! Jesus Christ, conquered the devil on the Cross. We have everything we need in Him and we have the authority to stand against the devil's attacks (cf. I John 4:4, James 4:7). Thus, as Christians, it's important to be aware of what we fill our minds with. We need to actively guard our thought-life and fill it with things of God. If we don't, the enemy will wreck havoc in our lives. This Bible study will provide a brief overview on how Christians are to guard their minds.

How the Enemy Attacks

As already stated, the enemy attacks believers through deception and falsehood (lies). We will examine two passages to do this.

Right at the beginning of the Bible, we learn that the fall of man happened as a result of deception. In Genesis 3, we are introduced to the serpent, followed by a dialog that occurs between the serpent and Eve. The serpent twisted the words of the Lord. He convinced Eve that what the Lord said would not indeed happen, "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be

like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5, NIV). Eve listened to the serpent and ate of the fruit. In her dialog with God preceding the incident, she said "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen 3:13, NIV). A key principle that can be drawn from this example is that our minds affect our actions. What we think about shapes our actions. Prior to meeting the serpent, Adam and Eve had been following the Lord's commands. Their minds were filled with truth and their actions reflected that. Once the serpent planted deceit into Eve's mind, her actions followed.

Matthew Henry (1706-1721), a well-known Biblical commentary writer, wrote, "the work of the Holy Ghost first begins in the understanding, and is carried on to the will, affections, and conversation, till there is a change of the whole man into the likeness of God." If the work of the Holy Spirit first works in understanding (the mind) in order to affect change of the whole man, it should not be thought otherwise for the enemy. The mind affects our whole being. *[Read the Power of Worrying, see appendix A]*

The mind is an incredibly powerful place. It can create scenarios that are not based on reality or truth. Our thoughts can lead us to all sorts of trouble: worry, doubt, anxiety, fear, restlessness, to list a few. Our minds also govern how we perceive reality. Reality is not based on what we see, it is based on our perception. Reality is constructed in the mind. It is an interpretation of a situation. Two people can look at the same situation and think two entirely different things about it. If the devil is able to bring deceit and falsehood into our minds, our perception of reality can be severely skewed. He can easily twist and distort what is real and true. Finally, our minds govern our actions. What we think in our minds affects the way we live. Romans 12:2 [NLT] says "let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."

If the enemy can plant deceit and falsehood into our minds, he's gotten a significant foothold in our lives. Ephesians 4:26-27 [NIV] says, "do not give the devil a foothold." The word in Greek for foothold is literally translated as "place" (Snodgrass, 1996). We must not give the enemy any place in our lives. We must be on guard at all times to prevent this from happening. More will

be discussed on this later.

A word regarding the heart should be mentioned here. The mind and the heart, while separate entities, are connected. They go hand in hand with one another. The mind influences the heart, and the heart influences the mind. It's important for believers to actively guard both of these, but we will look at guarding the heart in another study.

Q: Have you ever been deceived? Describe the situation, what happened?

Q: After hearing all this, why do you think the mind is such a crucial place for attack?

Resisting the Devil

In Matthew 4, we learn of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Satan tries to tempt Jesus through deception and falsehood. He tries to twist the words of Scripture in his favour, by taking it out of context. Jesus recognizes this and interestingly enough, combats Satan with the words of Scripture. Jesus exercises wisdom and discernment in this case.

Q: Have you ever been fed lies by the enemy, things that brought fear, anxiety, worry, doubt, mistrust in your life? What was that like? How did it happen? Were you able to stand against it?

How do we guard our minds?

As we've discussed, the devil will try to fill our minds with deceit and falsehood. If these thoughts come, we must shoo them away immediately. We cannot give them any more time than that or we are allowing the devil a foothold into our lives. This can be done accomplished by addressing the thought with a firm "no" or by replacing the thought with a different thought. We can learn from Jesus' example to resist the enemy, by proclaiming truth and standing firm in it. James 4:7 [NIV], "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Thoughts need time to develop. If we can get rid of them immediately, we have stood firm against the enemy's attacks. If we don't, the thoughts will have the sufficient time it needs to grow and develop. Soon enough, those thoughts will consume us and begin to affect our hearts, our perceptions, our behaviours and our attitudes. This is precisely what he wants. He wants us to allow deceit and falsehood to linger in our minds, because he knows the kind of destruction they can cause. The way we

combat deceit and falsehood is with the truth, like we've seen in Jesus' example earlier. It is not enough to simply fight against the thoughts; we need to also fill our minds with truth.

Q: Have you ever allowed your thoughts to run its full course? What happened?

Before talking about how we should fill our minds, it is important to mention just how easy for us to allow our minds to be filled with ungodly things. We are constantly being bombarded by the values and morals of the world on a regular basis. Without knowing it, this constant exposure gets into our subconscious and becomes engrained into our own value system. We need to be cautious about what we watch, what we read and what we listen to. Practically speaking, this means we should be careful about the tv shows, the movies, the music, the media that we listen to. As well, we should be careful about what we read.

Q: What are the values/morals that the world teach us? How do they compare to what God says in His Word?

In light of this, the way we should fill our minds is with truth. Paul instructs us to fill our minds with Godly things and dwell on them in Philippians 4:8 [NASB], "finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." A key word from this passage is dwell, or *logizomai* in Greek. Paul uses this verb in the imperative form. The imperative form is a command. Paul is not simply suggesting that we dwell on these things, he is commanding us to do it. Dictionary.com, defines the verb dwell as "to live or continue in a given condition or state." This means that dwelling is not a one-time action. It is something that is done continually. This is an important principle. We must continually dwell on the things of God, at all times, in the truth of His Word and in the truth of His character. This is how we renew our minds. We can do this by memorizing Scriptures, especially ones that have to do with our identity in Christ and the promises of God. We mustn't ever let up on doing this, not even for a moment. Remember, we are in a spiritual war. The enemy isn't about to give

up. The enemy is bent on bringing destruction and death. He is ruthless and relentless and will continue to attack until Christ comes again.

In Ephesians 6, the first piece of armour that Paul tells us to put on is the belt of truth (cf. 6:14). If we don't fill our minds with the truth, we cannot combat lies and deception because we don't know any better. We cannot fight against what we don't know. If we never see the light, we will never know we are in darkness. Psalm 119:105 [NIV], "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

It should be said that it is not easy to recognize lies and deception from what the truth is. It requires both wisdom and discernment. Thankfully, as believers, we have the Holy Spirit. If we are unable to determine the source of the thoughts, we should ask the Holy Spirit to shed light into our situation. We can ask God for wisdom and discernment. By doing so, we can take "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:5 [NIV]. If the thought is evil, draining, discouraging, confusing, negative, it is not from God. God is the giver of life. He brings encouragement, restoration, healing, love, joy, and peace into our lives.

Closing Words

The mind is an incredibly powerful place. It is the starting point of our thoughts, perceptions, behaviours and attitudes. As such, the mind is a battlefield in which the enemy seeks to gain a foothold. Knowing this, we must constantly be on guard, protecting our mind from the deception and falsehood of the enemy. We do this by saturating ourselves in truth and by asking the Spirit of God to remind us of what is true, what is noble, and what is praiseworthy. As we do this, we can be assured that the "peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 [NIV]).

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Appendix A: “The Power of Worrying” By Author Unknown

Source: http://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon2c/power_of_worrying.htm

Death was walking toward a city one morning and a man asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take 100 people," Death replied.

"That's horrible!" the man said.

"That's the way it is," Death said. "That's what I do."

The man hurried to warn everyone he could about Death's plan. As evening fell, he met Death again. "You told me you were going to take 100 people," the man said. "Why did 1,000 die?"

"I kept my word," Death responded. "I only took 100 people. Worry took the others."

This interesting tale portrays so well what the National Mental Health Committee reported a few years ago - half of all the people in America's hospital beds are constant worriers. Mental distress can lead to migraine headaches, arthritis, heart trouble, cystitis, colitis, backaches, ulcers, depression, digestive disorders and yes, even death. Add to that list, the mental fatigue of nights without sleep and days without peace. Then we get a glimpse of the havoc worry plays in destroying the quality and quantity of life.