

ILLUSTRATED MESSAGE SERIES BY PASTOR RICHARD BASED ON
THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS BY C.S.LEWIS

The Screwtape Letters ~ Letter 13 ~ Faith & Works

January 17th, 2021

Before reading the following overview of this Letter, please click on the link above to read the book and for today's Illustrated Message, please read **Letter 13**. These Illustrated Messages are illustrated with the Word of God. There's no better way to illustrate this story that C.S. Lewis has written other than with the Bible.

Most superstitious people avoid the #13 by taking it off of elevators, off of floor numbers or simply just not liking that date, but that's not us today!

Screwtape says to Wormwood about the Patient: *"The situation is very grave, and I really see no reason why I should try to shield you from the consequences of your inefficiency. A repentance and renewal of what the other side call "grace" on the scale which you describe is a defeat of the first order. It amounts to a second conversion—and probably on a deeper level than the first."*

Now there isn't such a thing as a 2nd conversion, there is one and if someone backslides, they come back to Christ from a backslidden state. Some Christians, define grace as a dispensation of mercy that God gave them by dying on a cross for their sins, which Jesus did do, and that His grace removes all their past, present and future sins in a way that they are never remembered against them by God.

However, grace is not only the removal of confessed past and present sins upon confession, but it is the power that God gives us to not to continue in those sins or other sins in the future.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 says; *"7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to [b]buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

It's not clear what Satan was buffeting Paul with, but we do know that he pleaded with God three times for it to depart from him, but God simply states; *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*

So no matter how the devil is allowed by God to tempt you in areas of weakness, God's grace is always sufficient and His strength is made perfect in whatever weakness you are experiencing at the time. God's grace is a supernatural strength that will always give you the ability to submit yourself unto Him in times of weakness and resist the devil's temptation to sin.

Verse 10 continues to say; *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

If you're honest with yourself, no matter what area in your life you're weak in, that means that Christ is strong in you in that area. No matter what the temptation then, you have the strength and grace to overcome.

With all the buffeting that Paul was experiencing in the list above, there had to have been various temptations that would have been presented to him in times of weakness, after all, is this not what Jesus experienced himself while fasting for 40 days and nights?

We read about this in **Matthew 4:1-11**; *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*

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4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' " *5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "* *7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not [a]tempt the Lord your God.' "* *8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, [b]"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "* *11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him."*

You'll notice that Jesus always used the Word of God to deal with the temptations that were presented to Him by Satan, and this enabled Him to resist the temptation in times of weakness.

In **1 Corinthians 10:12-13**, the Apostle Paul says this about temptations that come our way; *"12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to [a]bear it."*

Jesus took the way of escape by using God's Word found in the Bible, should we be any different or exempt of having to do the same? This scripture makes it very clear that God does not allow you to be tempted without providing a way of escape and He will never allow you to be tempted above any weakness you are experiencing.

You have to take ownership of the sin and weakness and not pass it off, because you're without excuse. So what it comes down to, is that regardless of how weak you are in a certain area of your life, you are without excuse when you choose to sin, because God has not only given you grace as a strength in times of weakness, but always will provide the way of escape that is found in His Word, the Holy Bible, that would apply to the area you are being tempted in. No wonder Screwtape wants to keep the Patient out of the Word and prayer. He doesn't want him to enjoy it or have pleasure or comfort from it either.

Screwtape says; *"And now for your blunders. On your own showing you first of all allowed the Patient to read a book he really enjoyed, because he enjoyed it and not in order to make clever remarks about it to his new friends. In the second place, you allowed him to walk down to the old mill and have tea there—a walk through country he really likes, and taken alone. In other words you allowed him two real positive Pleasures. Were you so ignorant as not to see the danger of this?"*

As we've seen in past Letters, Screwtape does not want the Patient to enjoy himself, under any circumstances, especially joy that comes from reading the Bible, or having fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The Patient took pleasure in reading a book and taking an enjoyable long walk which, as a result, led him to repentance of sin and a renewal of his relationship with God. This book he was reading was not some secular novel, but rather the Word of God. This is why demons go out of their way to get Christians to not read the Bible and be alone with God in prayer, because it's there that they discover their true identity, found in Christ, and not in what the world offers as a masquerade, which is a fake identity.

If you're a Christian, your identity is in Christ and the safest place to be as a Christian, is always meditating in God's book, the Holy Bible, for the Word of God is alive.

Hebrews 4:12 says; *"12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

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Psalm 1:1-3 says; “*1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the [a]ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he [b]meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the [c]rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.*”

This is the power of meditating in God’s Word, you’ll prosper in all that you do. Come out from the counsel of the ungodly, come out from standing in the paths of sinners, come out from sitting in the seat of the scornful. Our true identity and purpose is found in God’s Word, and it’s here that we discover who we really are as God created us as unique individuals, that are conformed to His image and likeness.

Screwtape says; “*But you were trying to damn your Patient by the World, that is by palming off vanity, bustle, irony, and expensive tedium as pleasures. How can you have failed to see that a real pleasure was the last thing you ought to have let him meet? Didn't you foresee that it would just kill by contrast all the trumpery which you have been so laboriously teaching him to value? And that the sort of pleasure which the book and the walk gave him was the most dangerous of all?*”

Why would it have been the most dangerous of all? It was the meditation on God’s Word, taking a long walk with the Lord, the Holy Spirit and letting Him shine light on the sin in his life which led to repentance.

It appears that in the midst of all the temptations that Wormwood was using to distract him with, were nothing in comparison to the walk with God alone and reading of the Bible. Screwtape’s intention for the Patient was not for Wormwood to tempt him with the sins of the flesh, but rather keep the Patients Christian walk to not at all be pleasurable and keep him legalistic to the point where he can’t enjoy anything in the world so long as he remains a Christian.

Jesus says this in **John 10:10**; “*10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*”

One could only assume that this abundance is not only the hope of eternal life in heaven, but abundance – spirit, soul and body – here on earth. Abundance found in the Word, in prayer, in communion, in corporate worship in church; all of these direct you to Christ and to repentance. That is abundant life! A person can be poor in the physical realm yet be rich in the Spirit, in Christ. This is not a prosperity message. This is abundance in Christ; by reading His Word, by prayer, long walks with Jesus and repentance of sin.

Screwtape says of the enemy (God); “*Of course I know that the Enemy also wants to detach men from themselves, but in a different way. Remember always, that He really likes the little vermin, and sets an absurd value on the distinctness of every one of them. When He talks of their losing their selves, He only means abandoning the clamour of self-will; once they have done that, He really gives them back all their personality, and boasts (I am afraid, sincerely) that when they are wholly His they will be more themselves than ever.*”

As a Christian, you don’t lose your individual identity as a person. Each of us are wired differently. We have different DNA, different gifts and different abilities. That’s how God created us. So that is not the point of what is being said in this statement, unless it gets in the way of God’s Word and will in your life. It is that of denying yourself for the sake of Christ.

Jesus says this in **Matthew 16:24-26** (Amplified Bible); “*24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [[a]cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying, also]. 25 For whoever is bent on saving his [temporal] life [his comfort and security here] shall lose it [eternal life]; and whoever loses his life [his comfort and security here] for My sake shall find it [life everlasting]. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life [his*

blessed [b]life in the kingdom of God]? Or what would a man give as an exchange for his [blessed] [c]life [in the kingdom of God]?”

So anything that gets in the way of God’s will for your life, you’re to deny. I believe that it’s only after you die to self (the old, unregenerated, man/woman), that you’re going to find your new self (new man/woman), who Christ intended you to be.

Jesus says in **John 12:23-26**; “23 But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much [a]grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.”

Screwtape says of the Patient; “*The great thing is to prevent his doing anything. As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilising the seeds which the Enemy plants in a human soul. Let him do anything but act.*”

We read in **James 2:14-20** the following about Christianity in action; “14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without [a]your works, and I will show you my faith by [b]my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is [c]dead?”

Demons don’t mind you writing a book about your new found belief in Christ and repentance, just so long as you don’t show your faith by your works, because even the demons believe in God and tremble. Believing in Christ is one thing, but receiving Christ and living the life of a Christian is another. Believing in Christ is one thing, but attending church, participating in corporate worship and taking communion as commanded is another, because that is action, which the devil does not want a Christian to do. The gifts that the Holy Spirit has given each Christian have to be acted upon when in fellowship with other Christians, and for the most part, that happens in church. Screwtape obviously doesn’t mind the writing of books or even songs for that matter, the wearing Christian symbols but what the devil doesn’t want, is spiritual growth that happens in church as you’re fellowshiping with other Christians in the body of Christ.

Hebrews 10:25 says; “*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

Believing in Jesus is one thing, receiving Him as Lord and being obedient and acting on His Word is another.