

SATAN'S MOST SUBTLE SCHEME (Compiled by Curtis Lanclos)

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are from the New King James Version (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

I. Introduction

A. **Luke 4:1-4**

¹Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. ³And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' "

1. The Lord Jesus Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (**Hebrews 4:15**). Because He has suffered temptation, He is able to help us when we are tempted (**Hebrews 2:17,18**).
2. Jesus used the written Word of God to resist temptation. If He would have relied on His "deity status" to resist the devil, then we would not have a realistic example of how to resist him ourselves!

B. **Luke 4:5-8**

⁵Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷"Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." ⁸And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

1. Some would suggest that Satan is lying here about the idea that he has authority over all the kingdoms of the world. Although Satan is the father of all lies (**John 8:44**), he is not lying here; if he were, this would not have been a legitimate temptation. He was offering Jesus a false shortcut to fulfilling His purpose.
2. God originally gave Adam authority and dominion over this world (**Genesis 1:26**). However, Adam handed this authority over to Satan when he sinned; "*this* has been delivered to me"...vs. 6. The Lord Jesus called Satan the "prince (ruler) of this world" on three occasions (**John 12:31, John 14:30, John 16:11**), and the apostle Paul calls him the "god of this world" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). **1 John 5:19** says that the whole world is under the sway (power and control) of the wicked one (Satan).
3. Again, Jesus resists Satan's temptation with the written Word of God.

C. **Luke 4:9-13**

⁹Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰“For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,’ ¹¹“and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ” ¹²And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ” ¹³Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

1. In this passage, we see Satan’s “last ditch effort” to tempt the Lord Jesus. After Jesus uses the Word of God twice to resist him, Satan decides to use Scripture himself; however, he twists it out of context in an attempt to place Jesus in bondage.
2. The Lord interprets Satan’s quotation by using another one, placing it in its proper context. Thus, Satan gives up for the time being.
3. Herein we see a principle of *Satan’s modus operandi*. If he recognizes that a believer is a person who knows the Scriptures, he will attempt to twist the interpretation in such a way that it places or keeps this believer in bondage. He tries to use the Scriptures to present a false image of God, and actually disguise himself as being God’s messenger...

a. **2 Peter 3:15,16**

¹⁵and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

b. **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**

¹³For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

II. Example - *Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh* – An isolated passage used by Satan to keep Christians in bondage to sickness and disease!

A. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

⁷And 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 buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰Therefore 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.

1. This passage has been used by Satan and his cohorts for years. It is used to keep believers in the bondage of sickness and disease; even full-gospel Christians who believe in divine healing!
2. We are going to use other passages of Scripture to interpret this passage, and thus bring deliverance and hope to those held in bondage by an incorrect interpretation.

B. 5 Keys for Interpreting 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

1. *Paul clearly states that his “thorn in the flesh” was a messenger of Satan, not God (vs. 7).*

a. **2 Corinthians 12:7**

⁷And 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 buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

- b. Satan assigned a messenger (the Greek word is *aggelos* which is also translated “angel” elsewhere in Scripture) to Paul to buffet him in response to God giving him “abundance of revelations.” Humorously, people who usually claim to have a “thorn in the flesh like Paul” do not have the corresponding “abundance of revelations” from God that would warrant such a counter-balancing attack from the enemy!

- c. It has also been said that the “thorn in the flesh” was given to Paul to keep him from becoming full of pride (an interpretation of “exalted above measure”) over the “abundance of revelations.” However, this makes precious little sense; because a messenger of Satan would not try to keep a Christian (least of all, Paul) humble. Satan is the personification of pride. If anything, he would try to get Paul INTO pride! The exaltation that Paul is most likely speaking of is that which comes when you humble yourself to the Lord and the revelation of His Word. God desires to exalt you (**Joshua 3:7, Joshua 4:14, Psalm 37:34, Proverbs 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:6!**)

2. *“Thorn in the flesh” (vs. 7) is a figure of speech that is similarly used by God elsewhere in Scripture.*

a. **Numbers 33:55**

⁵⁵“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain *shall be* irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.

b. **Joshua 23:13**

¹³“know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

- c. God essentially told Israel that the inhabitants of the land of Canaan would be “thorns in their flesh” if they did not drive them out. Again, this is a figure of speech (similar to the modern-day phrase “pain in the neck”). This is obviously not talking about sickness, but the external irritation that comes from those who do not desire to follow after God; PERSECUTION.
3. *Paul makes reference to **suffering for the cause of Christ** in this passage (vs. 10) and the previous chapter.*
- a. **2 Corinthians 12:10**
¹⁰Therefore 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.
- b. **2 Corinthians 11:22-30**
²²Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶*in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷*in* weariness and toil, *in* sleeplessness often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness— ²⁸besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? ³⁰If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.
- 1) Nathaniel Van Cleave (Foursquare Church Author) wrote:
When we consider that Paul was constantly ministering, along with earning his living by tentmaking, that in his many travels he was stoned, shipwrecked several times, and imprisoned several times, we must conclude that his health was quite robust. In **2 Corinthians 11** he gives a whole list of his labors, tribulations, and persecutions, but makes no reference whatever to sickness.¹
- 2) Traditionally the “thorn in the flesh” has been thought to be a physical sickness. However, if read in context with **2 Corinthians 11:22-30** and **2 Corinthians 12:10**, it should be fairly obvious that Paul was speaking of external things that he was suffering for the cause of Christ. Sickness is indeed a type of suffering, but it is not suffering for the cause of Christ!

¹ Nathaniel Van Cleave, *God’s Way to Wholeness: Divine Healing by the Power of the Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), page 157.

4. *The power of Christ rests on those who suffer for the cause of Christ (vs. 9).*

a. **2 Corinthians 12:9b**

⁹...Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

b. **1 Peter 4:12-16**

¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

1) Peter uses similar terminology to that of Paul in vs. 14. In other words, partaking of Christ's sufferings involves being reproached for his name sake by other people.

2) Peter makes it clear that not all human suffering can be considered Christian suffering. Christian suffering ALWAYS involves the presence of other people that hate the Gospel in some capacity.

5. *The power (strength) of Christ is His grace (vss. 8,9).*

a. **2 Corinthians 12:8,9**

⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And 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.

1) Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this messenger of Satan and the Lord's answer is "My grace is sufficient for you." The traditional interpretation of this is that Paul was sick, and asked God to heal him three times, and God's answer was "no." However, we have already concluded that there is enough evidence to prove that the "thorn in the flesh" was not a sickness, but rather a messenger of Satan sent to stir up persecution against Paul.

2) God's answer is awesome, if you have an understanding of grace. Grace is not merely "unmerited favor" (we've heard that definition so much that it means very little to us); **Grace is God's power and strength operating in our lives even though we don't deserve it.** In other words, God would not take away the persecution (that is one thing believers are NOT redeemed from), but He would provide the strength and power to endure and overcome it.

- 3) Another prominent Bible character asked to be delivered from suffering for righteousness sake (persecution) three times; and the answer from God for Him was the same as it was for Paul...
- a) **Matthew 26:39-46**
³⁹He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.” ⁴⁰Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, “What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.” ⁴²Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” ⁴³And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶“Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”
 - b) **Luke 22:39-43**
³⁹Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. ⁴⁰When He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴²saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” ⁴³Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.
 - c) God would not “take away” Jesus’ cup of suffering. Rather, He sent an angel to provide the grace and strength to go through it. Jesus of Nazareth was just as dependent on the grace and strength of God as Paul was! Paul instructs us to “be strong in the Lord” (**Ephesians 6:10**) as well!

III. Conclusion

- A. Taken in context, Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” is a messenger of Satan who was sent to buffet him by stirring up persecution against him.
- B. Therefore, Satan has placed believers in bondage by getting them to believe that Paul’s “thorn” was a sickness that God refused to heal (and thus, a contradiction of **Psalm 103:1-3**, **Matthew 8:16-17**, **1 Peter 2:24**, and other Scriptures that refer to our covenant of healing). After all, if the apostle Paul couldn’t get healed, what right do any of us have to expect to be healed?