

LEARN TO DISCERN

SATAN IS A LIAR: "...there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 NIV). He may use facts, but he'll never speak truth. Here's an example of the difference between the two:

- Facts may say that you have a sickness; satan's report is, *"Therefore, give up! You're about to die! Why not just whimper your way to the grave?"*
- But God's report (TRUTH) speaks thusly: *"You may have a sickness, but you also have a Healer who loves you, who is living in you, and who shed His Blood for you. He has all your days numbered in His Book (Psalm 139:16), and satan cannot steal even one of them. The LORD will fulfill His purposes for you (Ps. 138:8). Therefore, be of good courage, be strong, and rejoice in Him! Great is your reward, and He will be glorified through all you endure. You can trust the Man who died for you – He will not leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), so be at peace."*

If satan said it, you can count on it being a lie. And if God has said it, you know it's categorically TRUE, because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

"So how can I tell the difference between what God speaks to my heart, what the enemy says, and what is simply my own thoughts, ideas, desires, & feelings?"

That's a great question; people write whole books trying to answer it, and I'm not going to write a book right this moment. But I would like to share some simple encouragements that God has taught me over the years. As God's people, we must **"Learn to Discern"** between those thoughts which come from God, those which originate with the enemy, and those which are simply our own imaginations running wild. Here are some simple ways that can help us grow in discernment:

- **The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the Book for me:** If you want to avoid error, make good decisions, and not miss God's will, it's vital that you **be in God's Word every day** (and not just your "30-seconds a Day Quality Time with God Devotional," either). **The more you know God's Word, the more you'll learn to discern His Spirit's guidance and voice,** because His spoken word will always line up with His revealed Word.

- **Taste the Fruit and you'll Know the Tree:** Being born and bred in the beautiful Pacific Northwest (apple & pear country), I am especially qualified (perhaps even *uniquely* qualified) to instruct you in how to tell the difference between a pear tree & an apple tree. Ready? The pear tree is the one with pears on it. The apple tree is... well, you get the idea.

My point is this: all those trees look the same to me until I see the fruit; then I can tell you what's what. It's the same way in our thoughts: *God wants us to learn to discern the fruit of the thoughts that roll around in our minds.* Are the thoughts you're thinking leading you to trust & love God more? Are they building your faith? Are they encouraging you to love & serve others? Are they encouraging you to experience God's peace? If so, they're from God! You can prove that by testing them according to the standard found **Galatians 5:22-23**. Those verses tell us what fruit to look for when the Holy Spirit is present and allowed to work (love, joy, peace, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control). Test the fruit, and you'll discern the "tree" – the source of those thoughts.

BUT learning to discern will OFTEN tell you that the thoughts rolling around your noggin are *not* from God. Why? We have an adversary – the accuser of the brethren – and he wages war for influence in the minds of God's people!

"FOR THOUGH WE LIVE IN THE WORLD, WE DO NOT WAGE WAR AS THE WORLD DOES. THE WEAPONS WE FIGHT WITH ARE NOT THE WEAPONS OF THE WORLD. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY HAVE DIVINE POWER TO DEMOLISH STRONGHOLDS. WE DEMOLISH ARGUMENTS AND EVERY PRETENSION THAT SETS ITSELF UP AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND WE TAKE CAPTIVE EVERY THOUGHT TO MAKE IT OBEDIENT TO CHRIST."

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

You see, satan's best works are his most subtle; and his best lies are the ones that we never even attribute to him. He loves to make his whispered suggestions of fear, shame, discouragement, worry, lust, anger, jealousy, pride, etc. seem like our own thoughts – and darn *reasonable* thoughts, too! He knows that if he is allowed to influence our thoughts he will soon be influencing our attitudes, words, and actions, for it all starts with what and how we think. *"For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he..."* (Prov. 23:7, KJV).

As we grow in maturity in Christ (and thus become greater targets of the enemy), it is crucial that we learn to discern the fruit of our thoughts, to put them through the "strainer" or God's Word, and to identify the lies, temptations, and discouragement of satan.

“OK, so I recognize some lies in my thinking...now what?”

“ARREST AND REPLACE!”

- 1. Arrest:** Paul told us in 2 Corinthians 10 to *“take every thought captive”* to Jesus; that means to use the authority of Jesus’ name to make the enemy shut up. Try something like this: *“I recognize that these thoughts are not from God – and I take them captive in Jesus’ name! I make them obey the will and truth of Jesus Christ. I submit to God, I resist the devil, and he will flee from me, in Jesus’ name!”*
- 2. Replace:** *We must fill that area of our thinking with God’s thoughts.* For instance, if the area of influence is fear, you need to fill your mind and heart with what God’s Word says about fear:
 - *“Fear not, for I am with thee; neither be dismayed, for I am your God”* (Isaiah 41:10)
 - *“Perfect love casts out fear”* (I John 4:19)
 - *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me”* (Psalm 23:4)
 - *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”* (Psalm 27:1), and so forth.

You may find that the enemy’s thoughts come back pretty quickly; this indicates one of those *“strongholds”* Paul told the Corinthian church about. **And it will fall by the power of God as you arrest the bad and replace with God’s Word.**

The bigger the stronghold, the more renewing our minds need, and the longer the process *may* take – but don’t be discouraged! You’re not the one doing a good work in you; God is, and HE HAS PROMISED to bring it to fulfillment: *“He who has begun a good work in you will be complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6); *“For it is **God** who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13).

GOD WILL DO THE HARD PART. You just do *your* part: seek Him every day, ask for His Spirit’s help, and use the weapon He’s given you (the sword of the Spirit) against the enemy’s lies. In God’s timing and way, every stronghold will come tumbling down for His glory. Amen!

May the Lord make you BOLD as you seek Him,

Pastor Matthew Casey

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