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THE DEVIL: A PERSONAL STORY

The world, the flesh and the devil; well, as the saying goes, two out of three ain't bad. Yes it is—when it comes to struggling with sexual sin. The church today has no difficulty acknowledging the world and the flesh—they are all too real and all too potent in their attacks on us. But when it comes to the devil, or demons, or the forces of darkness, many of us choose to respond with what amounts to denial. And yet we read: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12).

In his introduction to *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis wrote:

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 pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.¹⁴

Surely, speaking in a broad sense, we live in a church where the latter attitude has been adopted. In fact, it seems that most modern Christians are actually embarrassed to talk about the devil and demons. Such talk seems primitive, unsophisticated, medieval, even bringing to mind questionable parts of our Christian history such as the Salem witch trials.

Flip Wilson was a very popular comedian in the 1970's, and he knew just how to draw on modern attitudes towards the devil and demons for purposes of humor. Flip was a young black man, an attractive comic who, in his stand-up routines, always played the wide-eyed innocent young guy. In most every performance, with his appealing little boy manner he would share some terrible thing he had done. And then he would declare with all the innocence he could muster, "The devil made me do it." Audiences roared with laughter. This statement accentuated his naivety, his not being too bright, and his childlike unwillingness to take responsibility for what he had done. No one took seriously "the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places."

But Jesus did. The gospels are full of specific instances in which Jesus cast demons out of people, as a part of healing or otherwise. They tell of times when ministering to crowds, "many" demons were cast out, and in sending out the 12 apostles, and later the 72, he gave them authority over demons.

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, MacMillan, 1961)

One has to wonder how much our ineffectiveness in dealing with sexual sin comes from our choosing to ignore our battle with demonic forces. We have seen too many Christian leaders fall sexually, men whose flagrant sexual sin has seemed to be so at odds with the apparent character and spirituality of these men. Were they dealing with some outside forces from the heavenlies that they did not know they needed to battle?

We do talk frequently of “spiritual warfare” in the church, but much of that talk seems to be highly theoretical. We will talk of our “weapons”, but we seldom truly acknowledge who our enemy is. When was the last time that you said, “I think he (or she) (or I) might have a demon?”

Although when speaking of dark forces that are indeed spiritual, our language and our experience may limit us, but I do believe that there is a good bit we do know from Scripture. We can distinguish between the devil and demons. I think we can’t be too wrong if we think of the devil as a single being—Satan, a specific fallen angel—who dwells outside of us and tries to influence us through lies and temptations, and demons are spiritual forces—operating under the authority of the devil—who somehow take residence in us, and influence us from inside our bodies.

I believe that every man who seeks to become God’s sexual man must acknowledge and deal with the influence of the devil. Further, I believe that many men who are on their way to becoming God’s sexual men are going to need to deal with demons along the way. Many will need deliverance prayer if their vision is ever to be achieve its fullest potential.

DEMONIC RELEVANCE TO SEXUAL SIN

This is not a book to explore the whole subject of demonology, but it is important to note that the devil and demons do two things that actively promote sexual sin. They lie and they tempt.

Their lies are legion. In sexual sin, they promise a satisfaction that is either never realized, or if experienced, is incredibly short lived and followed by deep disappointment. They lie to us about our “needs”. They tell us that if we don’t give in to our lust, it will never go away, that lust is inevitable. They tell us we “deserve” what our lusts crave. I could go on and on.

We don’t generally hear them audibly from outside our bodies, but somehow they speak from within the mind. Listen to your “self-talk”, and ask if what you are hearing is really true. If it is not, it could be the devil or a demon.

And, of course, they tempt. Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden by the devil who was in the form of a serpent. The devil was the source of the temptations that Job faced. Most significant of all, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil.

The devil, and his subordinates the demons, do not have the power to make us sin, but as deceivers and tempters, they greatly intensify our battles with sexual sin. Combined with

the world and the flesh, they provide a formidable enemy to the man who seeks sexual righteousness.

ALAN'S STORY OF DELIVERANCE

I have had a dramatic experience of demonic temptation and deliverance. I believe that God directly intervened in my life several years ago, in part, so that I would include the ministry of deliverance in this book. Had He not done so, I probably would have offered a few words about “spiritual warfare” and “rebuking Satan”—typical stuff in the evangelical church—and that would have been it. But the timing of what happened to me, and its dramatic nature, convinces me that God wants my story shared in this book.

Sharing this story is not something I want to do—for two reasons. First, I suspect my children and grandchildren will be reading this book, and it does not present a picture of their father and grandfather that I am happy to have them carry around with them for the rest of their lives. (Kids, if you want to skip this part, that’s quite okay with me). Second, it could actually discourage some readers, or it could disqualify me as a teacher in the eyes of some, causing them to not be able to benefit from whatever good this book has to offer. It reveals a level of sin in my life—more than 30 years after my conversion and having been set free from sex addiction—that would understandably cause some people to say, “Who is this guy to tell us how to become God’s sexual men?” Indeed, teachers, like pastors, are to be held to a higher standard (James 3:1).

But God did it, and it is true, and we should never fear the truth; it is one of the principle things that sets us free. Besides, I know of nothing that could better illustrate the role of deliverance in a Christian’s finding freedom from sexual sin.

BACKGROUND

I need to share with you where I have come from in my dealing with sexual sin. For about 25 years I was addicted to sexual fantasy and masturbation. This started in early adolescence, continued into my marriage and did not end until my conversion at age 38. The fantasies were almost always variations on the same theme. Even into adulthood I imagined myself as a young boy being abused by older men who were cruel and dominating.

On November 26, 1974, when I accepted Christ, I was totally set free from these fantasies and from masturbation—an experience, I must add, that is not something we typically encounter in our ministry. For twelve years, I had no desire to engage in these fantasies or to masturbate. Then, prompted by what I cannot recall, one day I masturbated. Terribly shaken by what I had done, I went to a Christian counselor. I was assuming that now God was going to deal with some of my brokenness that had not been dealt with in my miraculous healing in 1974. I knew this counselor to be a deeply spiritual man who spent much time in prayer over his clients—Regeneration sub-leased an office from the counseling agency with which he was associated. In the first session, he heard my story, and in the second session, told me that I did not need counseling, that I was dealing with sin, nothing more, that I was simply yielding to my desire for sexual pleasure and comfort.

I believe that the counselor was correct. Since my conversion I have had no desire to have sex with a man. I am not aware that any of the unmet needs in me that typically fuel a homosexual drive still had any power in my life. But I suspect that in my pre-conversion days I had forged in my brain a powerful link between certain images and sexual pleasure, and the Lord had allowed those images to lie dormant for a dozen years, but in some seemingly small act of rebellion I had revived them.

Soon after this happened, I received a letter from Penny Dalton, the leader of Whosoeverwill Ministry New York state telling me that God had directed her to give me this scripture: *Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:20-22).* This dear lady knew nothing of what I was going through, and because I was at the time president of Exodus International, the ministry to which we both belonged, she was very hesitant about sending it. But she was obedient and did. God bless her.

But the scripture quote and the word from the counselor did not end the struggles. Off and on I would struggle with temptations to fantasize and masturbate for years to come. Sometimes I yielded. The times were not frequent, but in the position I was in as a leader of a ministry helping people overcome sexual sin, I took my failures very seriously.

GOD'S MAJESTY AND MY SIN

There was a circumstance in which my struggles were especially severe. Years ago, before real estate prices went through the roof, my wife and I purchased an ocean front vacation home on Topsail Island in North Carolina. The plan was to rent it out, earning enough money to cover the costs of owning it, provide a vacation home for our family, and provide some income in our retirement. In God's gracious generosity all of this worked out.

The house has provided another advantages. When my wife and I are there in late winter getting it ready for rental season is when I have done my best writing. It seems to be that place where I can best hear the Lord. I am an early riser, and I go out on the deck each morning, usually just before sunrise, and almost always, I am overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord. The heavens truly do declare the glory of the Lord, as do the waves and the wind and the fading stars as they yield to the magnificent colors of the dawn, as do the gliding seagulls, the funny pelicans and the frolicking dolphins. I can see His might in the power of the seas and how he holds it back from our sand dune (most of the time). I can see his beauty, and order in His creation. I can see His incredible generosity in creating all of this for us.

Under the spell of His greatness and power, my heart seems especially open to Him, and this manifests itself providing both guidance in my personal life and inspiration in my writing.

But my times at the beach house are also my times of greatest struggle with lust. I had created a special section in my “library” of sexual videos in which I was a young boy left alone at the beach, and men regularly came by to abuse me.

One March a few years ago at the beach house, the Lord seemed to be speaking to me as clearly as I had ever heard him. Two things seemed to come across especially clear in my morning quiet times. First, He gave me a new structure for this book, one that stressed the idea of a vision and a journey. Second, He told me that I was to increase my ministry contacts with Roman Catholics. My conversion had come at the prayer meeting of a mostly Catholic charismatic group, individual Catholics had come into my life and ministry at critical points and ministered to me powerfully, and in some ways I had become a bridge between the primarily evangelical “ex-gay” ministries and Catholics involved in healing and sexually related ministry.

While these good things were happening, so were some bad. About the second week at the beach house, I yielded to the temptation to engage in the fantasies and masturbation. Then, only two or three days later, on an afternoon when my wife was off shopping, I again decided to indulge. By my standards, this was terrible; twice in one week. And I had done it so intentionally. I had effectively told God to shut up when the Holy Spirit called me to desist.

After I had done this, feeling terribly bad and wanting to busy myself with something, I went down into our garage where we keep the beach equipment. Every year I have to throw away the broken beach toys, get rid of extras plastic pails and shovels renters have left behind, and sweep the sand out of the storage area.

I pulled a box of beach toys off the shelf, ready to go through it, and when I reached into the box I pulled out a doll’s head. But it wasn’t a cute baby doll, it was the head of some kind of monster doll; dark and evil looking. As I lifted it out of the box, placing no more pressure on the head than was necessary to hold it, it spewed green liquid out of its mouth all over my legs and shoes. I was horrified. The doll looked like the devil himself, and it must have been totally full of this liquid.

I rushed upstairs to the kitchen to wash the liquid off my legs and pants, all the time dumbstruck by what had happened. All I could think was that the devil was flaunting his victory over me. Surely, if he had this much control over me, I could not go on in ministry. I could not write this book. We do have high standards of sexual morality for people in our ministry, but we know that if we disqualified people for periodic lust or even masturbation, we would be sore pressed to find people to minister. I had always told myself that my sin was not flagrant enough to disqualify me, and this was confirmed by those in ministry with whom I shared my struggles. But, now I doubted if this were true.

As was my usual practice, I waited until the next morning to deeply meditate on my sin and to confess it to God. I always read Psalm 51 when I am confessing, only this time, I read it with a passion I had not recently experienced. Then I asked God very directly, “Does this disqualify me from ministry? Has Satan won such a victory?” In a few minutes I felt quite clearly that God was saying that it did *not* disqualify me. But knowing how passionately I wanted to hear that answer, I questioned whether I was hearing God or my own desires. I asked Him to confirm what I thought He was saying in Scripture.

I tried to listen for Him to lead me to a Scripture, but all that came to mind was Psalm 91. It is a great Psalm of encouragement, so maybe it had a message for me. I opened my Bible, turning to Psalms, but instead of Psalm 91, I had turned to Psalm 71, and I started reading it before I realized I was reading the “wrong” Psalm. (I had no idea what was in Psalm 71; it wasn’t one that was at all familiar to me). The whole Psalm seemed to answer my question, but especially these two verses:

Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent. (verse 9) and,

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So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come* (verse 18).

I had my answer, and I resolved to do several things. I would share with my wife, Willa, what had happened and where I have been in my struggles. I had always told other men that, though their wife probably shouldn’t be their accountability partner—it is not a burden they should have to bear—if there was to be true intimacy and honesty in the marriage, the wife needed to know generally where the husband was in dealing with lust. I had been open to Willa earlier, but had not said anything to her for a few years. She was truly grateful when I did share with her.

I have also stressed men’s need for accountability to other Christians and our need to confess our sexual sins verbally to another person. The two men I had been most accountable to had moved away, and I did not think it appropriate to be accountable to men in our ministry who were much younger than I. So, I had recently gone to my Anglican priest for sacramental confession. But I have to admit, I had some reservations about sacramental confession. With my protestant background, I thought maybe the clergy and the church had reserved a bit too much authority to themselves, authority that might belong to all Christians. My one prior sacramental confession had not seemed to result in any change in me, but absent any other accountability, and trusting my pastor as a good and godly man and a friend, I determined to go to confession *every* time I engaged in sexual fantasy in the future, at least until some sort of broader accountability relationship could be found.

MY DELIVERANCE

Soon after I returned to Maryland, I set up my first Catholic contact. I called Father Peter F. Ryan, Associate Professor of Moral Theology at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, the second largest Catholic Seminary in the US, one that is faithful to Scripture and Church teaching. Fr. Ryan, had previously taught at Loyola College in Baltimore, a much more liberal institution. Fr. Ryan, a strong Christian and believer in what the Catholic teaches on moral issues had had Jeff Johnston of Regeneration speak on homosexuality to several of his classes. He also read Regeneration's newsletter, and was enthusiastic about my writing on sexuality. We had met together a couple of times, and he was a man I delighted to be with.

We met at his office in the seminary in April. I had not gone intending to share my story of the doll's head. However, he had a copy of Francis MacNutt's book, *Deliverance From Evil Spirits*¹⁵ on his desk. I commented on the book because I had talked with Francis MacNutt a number of times when he was writing a book on homosexuality. Fr. Ryan recommended the book, and we started discussing deliverance. This prompted me to share my story of the doll head, and of my subsequent reading of Psalm 71. He asked me if I would like him to do a prayer of deliverance over me. I certainly did.

After lunch, he got some water and blessed it, Then he took out a photocopy of questions from the MacNutt book to be asked preceding deliverance prayer. I answered the questions, denouncing a number of sinful practices, and answering negatively about any involvement in the occult. Then he prayed several prayers of deliverance over me and touched me with the holy water. This was not an exorcism—a very specific Catholic rite that is used in very special circumstances—and it was not at all dramatic or emotional. But during the prayer, I clearly saw in my spirit a small worm or snake-like creature crawling away from me. What impressed me most was its puny size. I also sensed I heard the Lord saying, "I made Satan reveal himself."

After the prayer, I shared with Fr. Ryan about the snake or worm and what I sensed God had said. He said he had wondered why Satan would reveal himself. I had too, given that Satan had been so successful with me operating unrecognized.

That was it. Since that day, several years ago, my yielding to fantasy has become less and less frequent, and I have experienced total victory over masturbation. Generally, when thoughts of fantasy or masturbation have come to mind, I have been able to dismiss them quickly and with ease. I firmly believe that the power of the tempter is gone from me in this area. I was delivered in the fullest Biblical sense.

Could the sins ever come back? Could I sin in these areas again? Having once experienced twelve years of freedom from sexual sin and then having gone back into it, I dare not say that I could never sin in these areas again.

¹⁵ Francis MacNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits*, (Grand Rapids, Chosen, a division of Baker Books, 2009).

But I believe that I, just as so many were in Scripture, was delivered from a demon whose power had contributed mightily to my sexual sin, and who could have cost me my ministry.

WHO SHOULD DO DELIVERANCE PRAYER?

Just before His ascension Jesus said, *And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons* (Mark 16:17). Clearly, “those who believe” could include any Christian. However, at this time in church history, where most of us have had so little experience with deliverance ministry, and believing that there are some dangers in the ministry, in most situations I believe it wise to seek an ordained person—a pastor, an elder, a presbyter, or a priest—for deliverance prayer.

I think it significant that an ordained person, a priest, performed my deliverance. The only other time in which I had a dramatic experience—a physical healing—from deliverance prayer also involved an ordained person, my pastor, Fr. Ed Meeks. Although it doesn’t involve sexuality, with the church having had so little on deliverance ministry, I believe this experience is also worth sharing,

A condition I have, Graves’ disease, had attacked the muscles that control my eyes, and I had become suddenly afflicted with double vision. I could barely walk across a room without bumping into furniture, much less drive a car. I could watch TV only with one eye covered up. There is no known medical cure for this condition.

I went to Fr. Meeks for healing prayer which he was pleased to offer. Although the prayer eased my anguish over becoming handicapped, it seemed to do nothing for the physical condition. Then my pastor’s wife, Jan, remembering that I had been stricken with Graves’ disease when I was in Poland said, “You were involved in real spiritual warfare when you were speaking on homosexuality in Poland. Maybe you need deliverance prayer.”

My book, *Growth Into Manhood*, had been translated into Polish, and I was on a speaking tour urging Christians to take a healing approach in dealing with homosexuality. I had indeed entered a spiritual battleground. Poland, that wonderful, long-suffering, blessed nation may be the last hope for the survival of Christianity in Europe. In their efforts towards fuller integration into the European Union, tremendous pressure is being brought to bear on Poland to ignore what their Catholic faith teaches, and to embrace homosexuality as most of Europe has done.

On a Thursday, Fr. Meeks prayed the deliverance prayer over me. By Friday the improvement in my eyesight was obvious. On Saturday, we left for our family vacation in North Carolina. I was not ready to drive the Interstate, so my daughter, Laura, helped my wife with the driving. On Sunday we went to The Chapel By the Bay, the small inter-denominational (but almost Baptist) church of which we are associate members. The pastor, Don Myers preached, as usual, a powerful sermon, this one on trusting God. With my only partially corrected eye condition, it was a message I needed to hear. While Pastor Don was preaching, I sensed the Lord saying to me, “Go wash on the pool of

Siloam,” the words that Jesus spoke to the man born blind whom He healed (John 9:7). There is no pool of Siloam on Topsail Island in North Carolina, but there is the Atlantic Ocean. I went home, put on my bathing suit, and jumped into the ocean. From that point until now, I have had no problems with double vision.

GUIDANCE IN DELIVERANCE PRAYER

I believe that all Christians, especially pastors and elders, should have some knowledge of deliverance prayer. A number of worthwhile books have been written on the subject, including those written by Derek Prince and Don Basham some years ago, but I believe the best contemporary resource is the aforementioned, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* by Francis MacNutt.

A FINAL WORD ON DELIVERANCE

No better words can be found to place deliverance in its proper place in the church’s ministry than those of Martin Luther in verse 3 of his great Hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.”

And tho this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us
We will not fail for God has willed His truth to triumph thru us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure; for lo! His doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.