

DEATH BY LOVE

LETTERS FROM THE CROSS

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Death by Love: Letters from the Cross

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“Demons Are Tormenting Me”: Jesus Is Katie’s *Christus Victor*

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

Katie is my friend, and I am her pastor. Katie was raised in what was supposed to be a Christian home, complete with a dad, mom, siblings, and semi-regular church attendance. Outwardly, their seemingly happy dispositions masked painful sin and darkness. Although successful in business and a leader in the church, her dad was a coward who avoided most of his homeward responsibilities by ignoring the well-being of his kids and getting drunk all the time.

From an early age, Katie began experiencing various forms of demonic oppression. She would hear from spirits that her father was negligent toward her because she was stupid, ugly, and not worthy of protection. She also suffered from horrendous nightmares and many physical pains following her molestation at age six at the hands of a male relative.

During her teen years, Katie was a dangerous combination of gullible, needy, and rebellious. Partly due to the lack of affection from her father, she craved male approval and touch. Because her father did not teach her about boys, she quickly trusted the first young men who showed any interest in her. By the age of thirteen she was sexually active and, although it is painful to admit, in many ways traded the use of

her body for the approval and companionship of young men. None of those young men ever truly cared about her, invested in her, or looked out for her.

In high school she was the quintessential party girl. She was regularly found drinking heavily, laughing loudly, and playing the role of the class slut under a list of boys so lengthy that to this day she cannot remember them all.

Over time, the sins she was committing and the sins that were being committed against her conspired to infect much of her soul. The flicker of passion that remained was for her father. Deep down she desperately wanted her father to cherish her, protect her, and rescue her.

At times she actually snuck boys into her bedroom to have sex with them while her father was home. Despite the noises coming from her bedroom, her father never once opened the door to check on his little girl. She wanted her father to know of her secret life but lacked the courage and relationship to confess it to him. She wished he would simply ask her how she was doing, speak to one of her boyfriends, or walk into her room late at night to discover that her sexual moaning was in fact a confused cry for help from a little girl's heart trapped in a ravished woman's body.

Tragically, her father never pursued or protected her. On one occasion he did knock on her door while she was having sex with a boyfriend but did not enter the room or do anything to show concern for his daughter. To make matters worse, rather than instructing and protecting, her father chose instead to mock her in front of the rest of the family for her parade of loser boyfriends, which only increased her shame and sense of worthlessness, since some of the boys who were the butt of her father's jokes were actually her rapists.

Some years later, Jesus did save her and draw her to himself. She found in Jesus the kind of love, forgiveness, and help that she had always needed. She stopped her party-girl ways and became a woman who deeply loved God and lived a life of repentant holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit. She married a very godly man who loves her, and God gave them beautiful children whom they are raising together as very godly parents. Together they are serving many people in active ministry. They have lived in complete faithfulness to one another as a loving Christian couple for many years.

Nonetheless, she describes feeling tormented. She struggles deeply with debilitating depression brought on by demonic lies. She is often haunted by the vain regrets of the sins of her past. She has endured a very long list of surgeries for innumerable physical problems and has undergone the removal of many body parts.

I have prayed for Katie for many years as she has suffered greatly while also growing in her love and appreciation for Jesus through her sanctifying afflictions. She has so blamed herself for all of the troubles in her life that she has been unwilling to also see the sins committed against her and the fact that behind it all is her great Enemy seeking to destroy her. However, she has recently concluded that perhaps her troubles include a spiritual warfare component that she has been overlooking. For this revelation I rejoice, and the letter that follows is my loving attempt to help my friend Katie come to experience more fully the victory of Jesus Christ over Satan, demons, sin, and death.



Dear Katie,

I want to begin my letter by restating the deep love that my wife and I have for you and your family. We praise God for your friendship and often thank God that our paths have crossed so that we can enjoy you and your family.

In recent weeks some of our mutual friends have contacted us, saying that they are concerned for your well-being. They report that your outlook on life has become very dark, fatalistic, and in many ways hopeless, though at the same time you have a strong faith in Jesus as your Savior. Your husband also reported the same thing to me when we met. As an encouragement, I was thrilled to see how deeply he cares for you, and I praise God that he is exactly the kind of defending, protecting, and providing man that you have needed since you were a little girl. Your strong love for him touches his godly heart deeply.

As we have spoken over the years, you have mentioned on a few occasions how, in the midst of the pain of your life as a young woman, you desperately wanted your father to step in to save and defend you as his treasure. As the daddy of two daughters I adore, I can assure you that God creates daddies for just such tasks, and that any daddy who fails in

his duty is in grievous sin, especially if he claims to be a Christian daddy. I am deeply sorry, and the thought of you being in your bedroom naked with a boy while your father knocks on the door without stepping in to liberate you haunts me when I pray for you.

However, I do believe that in such formative moments of your life, a pattern was established that needs to be broken. You have seen yourself as a sinfully wicked and dirty woman who is worthless and who deserves being violated and taken advantage of. Subsequently, you have become a passive victim waiting for someone—your father, husband, friends—to rescue you.

While your father did not fight for you, your husband will, as will your friends, along with me as your pastor. But, Katie, it is time for you to learn how Jesus has fought for you, and he is now calling you to fight with him for your own life and the life of your children. Because you belong to Jesus, you have all authority to rebuke and reject these evil influences in your life.

Without minimizing any of the many sins you have committed, or the many sins that have been committed against you, I also need you to understand the spiritual war that you are a part of. According to the Bible, angels are spirit beings created by God to serve his purposes. However, one angel became proud, which is the root of much sin, and preferred to be his own god rather than worship and obey the real God (Isa. 14:11–23; Ezek. 28:12). We now know him by various names such as Satan, the Dragon, the Serpent, the Enemy, the Devil, the Tempter, the Murderer, the Father of Lies, the Adversary, the Accuser, the Destroyer, and the Evil One. Tragically, one-third of the angels sided with Satan to declare war on God.

Their rebellion culminated in a great battle against God and his holy angels. Satan and his demons lost and were kicked out of heaven without the possibility of ever being forgiven or reconciled into a right relationship with God (2 Pet. 2:4). Practically, this means that only judgment and torment await Satan and demons.

Before we continue, I must also stress that Satan and demons are in no way equal to God. Unlike God, they are created beings with finite limits. They are not all-present, all-knowing, or all-powerful like God. They are, however, very real and very powerful. They have been observing human behavior since the beginning of history and are keenly

aware of how people live, and they have been continually perfecting their tactics on how to destroy us.

Without seeming unsympathetic, I do want you to see some ways in which this is encouraging. First, the fact that you are facing such great spiritual warfare is because you are serving Jesus faithfully.

Second, the warfare you are experiencing has been ongoing since you were a little girl and likely goes back even further into previous generations of your family. But God intends to bring it to an end before it continues in the lives of your children and grandchildren.

Third, although this battle has raged in your life for many years, God has recently opened your eyes to see it because you are at the point in your walk with Jesus that, for the first time, you are able to join Jesus in his battle for your life.

Fourth, God intends to work in your life as he did in the life of Joseph as recorded in Genesis 50:20. There we learn that even evil that is intended to destroy us is used by our sovereign God for good and the saving of many lives. No enemy can stop God's ultimate intent to do good.

Katie, the lessons you learn about Jesus' victory over Satan and the ways to live practically in light of his conquest will enable your ministry to help even more hurting people experience the full freedom and joy of their liberation.

Continuing on with the story of Scripture, the great war in heaven then moved to the new battlefield of earth. Here, Satan attacked our first parents, your father Adam and mother Eve. Satan lied to Eve and tempted her to sin, just as he did you. Adam, whom God appointed to love and care for Eve, failed to protect her, just like your father. Worse, he knowingly joined her in sin.

Both Adam and Eve chose lies over truth, pride over humility, folly over wisdom, death over life, and Satan over God. Subsequently, each of us descendants of our first parents is conceived with a sinful nature marked by a disposition to follow in their tragic footsteps. Furthermore, as a sinner you have experienced the same painful consequences as your mother Eve. Because of the sins you committed and the sins that were committed against you, you were alienated from God and hid from him in shame. The demons took advantage of this evil situation to torment you.

The battle for your soul has been very real, and you were held for many years like a captive in war, being tortured and brainwashed until Jesus came to rescue you. I know that you will find it difficult to accept the language, but Scripture clearly says that there is a very real war between Jesus and the angels and Satan and the demons. Sinners, including you, are taken as captives in war (Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:25–26). Jesus himself confirmed this fact in Luke 4:18 when, at the beginning of his earthly ministry, he said he had come to set captives free. Jesus said this because there is no way that Satan would release you from his captivity and no way that you could liberate yourself. Therefore, Jesus came as your triumphant warrior and liberator.

The first promise of Jesus as your victor over Satan came to your first parents. In Genesis 3:15, God preached the first good news, or gospel, of Jesus to your mother Eve, who, like you, was a broken, shame-filled, guilty sinner. God promised Eve, and her daughters like you, that Jesus would be born of a woman and would grow to be a man who would battle with Satan and stomp his head, defeat him, and liberate people from their captivity to Satan, sin, death, and hell.

Years later Jesus was born to his mother, Mary, as promised. Satan's attack on Jesus commenced when Jesus was only a boy. King Herod, who was a descendant of a demonically influenced family line of evil dictators, decreed that all firstborn sons be put to death in an effort to murder Jesus as an infant. Satan was, in fact, working behind this plot because he rightly knew that Jesus had come to conquer him and liberate his captives. But God warned Jesus' parents of the plot, and they fled to Egypt as refugees, so Jesus' life was spared.

As a young man, Jesus was again attacked by Satan, who offered him a much easier life than the one planned out for him by God the Father. God the Father sent Jesus to earth on the mission of living a sinless life and going to the cross to die for sinners. In contrast, Satan offered a kingdom without a cross and promised that Jesus could rule in glory and power without any opposition or crucifixion so long as he bowed down in honor to Satan. Satan set forth his proposal with a simple friendship offer of food, of breaking bread with Jesus, while Jesus was very hungry following forty days of fasting. Jesus wisely rejected this "gift." Like Jesus, it is very wise to be suspicious of spirits bearing gifts, even if they should appear to be good things. This is why discernment is so vital.

I tell you about this because from it you can learn a basic principle of how your Enemy works. The great Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote one of my favorite books on spiritual warfare, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*. Brooks uses a wonderful illustration that explains why Jesus rejected Satan's simple offer of bread. Brooks says that our Enemy will bait our hook with anything that we find desirable. This means that he will gladly give us sex, money, power, pleasure, fame, fortune, and relationships. Satan's goal is for us to take the bait without seeing the hook, and once the hook is in our mouth he then reels us in to take us captive. His gifts are often very good things offered for sinful uses. He'll challenge us to examine the gift to ensure its quality. That is the essence of the trap. The gift may be good, but the giver is evil. In this way, Satan and demons are akin to a pedophile who seeks to entice children into trust with gifts of candy and toys, only to destroy them.

When we take the gifts that Satan and demons give, we are in essence biting down on the bait. As a result, the hook of sin is in our mouth, and Satan reels us in as his captive so that, as Jesus says in John 8:34, we become slaves to our sin. Satan baited your hook with the affection of boys, sex, and alcohol, as well as with good things like protection and comfort. Having taken the bait, you were reeled into a dark and sinister life of evil that inevitably leads to death. Apart from Jesus, you would have seen your life continue to descend into darkness until you found yourself with Satan in hell forever. Furthermore, Satan is still using his gifts to tempt you today. His plan never changes, only his tactics.

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus came to rescue you. Unlike you, he resisted Satan's temptations on every occurrence and lived the sinless life that you have not lived. Jesus then went to the cross to die the death you should have died. On the cross, Jesus died in your place for your sins. Practically, this means that every single sin you have committed or will ever commit was forgiven, and every sin that was committed or ever will be committed against you was cleansed in full without exception. As 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Leading up to the cross, Satan entered one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas Iscariot, and conspired with him to betray Jesus and hand him over to be crucified. Through the cross, Satan and his demons thought that they had finally defeated Jesus. If we picture the Lord Jesus hang-

ing on the cross, bloodied and dying, it admittedly appears in every way that Jesus was hanging his head in defeat at the hands of Satan. On this point, the great Reformation pastor Martin Luther was fond of reflecting on Isaiah 45:15, which says of Jesus, "Truly, you are a God who hides [yourself], O God of Israel, the Savior." Luther's point in this verse is that on the cross Jesus hid his victory in defeat, hid his glory in shame, and hid our life in his death. Satan and the demons did not see this because they lacked the sight of faith and did not understand the humility of Jesus.

Nonetheless, on the cross Jesus bled and died for you, and by faith, as you look to the cross, you will see the great lengths he has gone to in the conquering of your Enemy and the liberating of your life. Consequently, Jesus' words, "It is finished," from the cross are his heralding of your liberation. Crucifying Jesus was the biggest mistake the Devil ever made. Had he understood what was happening, he would never have killed Jesus, as it says in 1 Corinthians 2:6–9:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

My favorite portion of Scripture on the victory of Jesus over Satan, sin, and death is Colossians 2:13–15:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

It would serve you well, Katie, to commit these verses to memory and spend the rest of your life asking God the Holy Spirit to teach them to you and give you the faith to believe them.

The imagery from Colossians is actually taken from the great battle victories celebrated in antiquity. As best I can, with admitted poetic license, I want to explain to you what this section of Colossians, along with some imagery from Revelation, means, so you will see that Jesus, unlike your father, has fought for you. I know this has been the desire of your heart deep down for many years; you have repeatedly said that you have always wanted a man to fight for you and are most attracted to your husband when he is strong, courageous, and willing to fight for your life and joy.

To every unbelieving eye, the Great Dragon was the crowned victor, standing over Jesus Christ in the ring of human history, spewing blasphemies, spitting upon his face, placing a crown of thorns upon his head in mockery, and pulling out Jesus' beard as he lay beaten and stripped naked on the dust of his own earth. Placing a knee on one limb at a time, the Great Dragon held in his hands a large hammer and spikes to nail Jesus' body to a Roman cross. With his army of demons and human servants cheering their king and his conquest, the Great Dragon laughed loudly while nailing a mocking banner above Jesus' head that read, "King of the Jews." The Great Dragon raised up the broken, beaten, and bloodied crucified Jesus for all to see, so that Jesus would be shamed by the people and spirits he had made who gathered to cover him with spit, curses, and jeering. Jesus breathed his last as the Dragon raised his head in pride to declare his ultimate victory as new King and Lord. Meanwhile, Jesus' body was laid in a tomb, and his followers left in utter silence, leaving a path muddied with tears behind them.

But . . .

Three days later, Jesus your Warrior King rose in victory over death. Seeing Jesus alive, the Great Dragon snatched you as his captive, drew his sword of law, covered with the blood of your sin, and thrust its razor-sharp point at your head, naming every sin you have committed along with the name of every boy who ever touched you. Smiling, Jesus stepped forward and declared that he already paid the penalty for your sins on the cross, canceled any right Satan had to hold you captive, and defeated your Enemy along with his servants and their works and effects in your life.

With fear in his eyes, the Great Dragon dropped his sword from your head and was overcome with dread as he understood the victory Jesus

had won for you through his seeming defeat. Drawing his own sword of truth, Jesus landed a crushing blow on the head of the Great Dragon, shattering his helmet and bloodying his head. Jesus then stepped toward the Great Dragon and thrust the pommel of his sword against his mouth, shattering his teeth and sending them violently down his throat. Then, with a blow to his armor, Jesus doubled the Great Dragon over, leaving him gasping for air and unable to bellow his curses and blasphemies anymore. With a crushing elbow to the back of the head, Jesus dropped the Great Dragon into the very dust in which Jesus himself had lain three days prior, and the blood of the Great Dragon fell upon the dried blood of your Savior. Jesus stripped the Great Dragon of all his armor and clothing as his bowed head and bloodied mouth moaned in the agony of utter defeat.

Ashamed of your many years at the Dragon's side, you stood off to the side alone, gazing at the ground until Jesus came to you. Taking your chin in his hand, Jesus lifted your face, looked you in the eye, and told you that your sins were forgiven, your Enemy conquered, and your life liberated from captivity, and that God is now your Father, new life is your gift, and heaven is your home. As tears streamed down your face, Jesus asked you always to remember to see yourself as he does, not in light of what you have done or what has been done to you, but rather solely by what he has done for you as your victorious Warrior King.

At that moment, Katie, you felt freedom for the first time. At that moment, what Jesus had done for you was made known to you by God the Holy Spirit. At that moment, you stepped over the fallen Dragon and embraced Jesus with a passionate joy you had previously never known.

You were finally known.

You were finally loved.

You were finally safe.

You were finally free.

One day, Jesus will chain the Serpent to his chariot and force him to walk naked, bloodied, and bowed into his kingdom. Following behind Jesus will be all of his warrior-saints, from bloodied Abel to John the Baptizer and Paul, who met their death on the battlefield of human history. With them will be Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and their comrades from church history. And you, Katie, will be among them,

smiling and laughing and dancing and singing because you too have been set free from captivity to your Enemy.

Following you in shameful defeat will be all of the demons and unrepentant evildoers who have ever sinned against you. Joining your enemies will be Cain, Pharaoh, Herod, Judas, and their aged generals Sin and Death. They will all be chained together at the wrists and shackled at the feet with their mouths gagged so they can no longer blaspheme God or name your sin.

This triumphant procession will follow a flower-laden street with Jesus' chariot at the head, and it will enter the Holy City, a kingdom filled with worshipers clothed in white shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

A hush will fall as Jesus, stepping upon his throne, preaches that he alone is King and Lord and that when he was nailed to the cross, so were your sins, so that you could be liberated from your captivity to the Dragon, demons, sin, and death. Overcome, you and the rest of the liberated captives will stand motionless and silent for about half an hour, completely overwhelmed by the grace that has been poured out through the cross of Jesus Christ (Rev. 8:1).

Katie, you will struggle for the rest of this life to comprehend this reality, because it is a matter of faith rather than sight. We see the Devil's work everywhere in this world and will until Jesus returns to bring it all to an end. Until then, it is by faith that we see the authority of the kingdom of God that has invaded this world (Eph. 1:17–23).

We long for the final defeat of the Dragon with the return of Jesus. But the authority of the Devil and his demons in your life has already ended. Matthew 28:18 makes it very clear that Jesus has *all* authority now, which means that Satan has no authority over you as a Christian. We who are by grace citizens of Jesus' kingdom will never again have to obey the Dragon's orders, satisfy his desires, or live as his captives. Jesus has thoroughly freed you from all your obligations to and agreements with the Dragon by bringing you into his kingdom of light. As a result, you can now live in accordance with Colossians 1:10–14 and

walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his

glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Bible uses the word *grace* to explain the victory Jesus achieved for you on the cross, because there is no logical reason that God would love you and die in your place to liberate you from captivity to Satan, sin, and death other than his wonderful nature.

Furthermore, though defeated, Satan and demons are not yet fully destroyed until the final judgment at Jesus' white throne (Rev. 20:11–15). Subsequently, their work continues on the earth, which means you must be wise. As the Puritan William Gurnall once said, "Where God is on one side, you may be sure to find the devil on the other." Therefore, in an effort to help you be wise, I want to share with you some things from the Bible that have been of great help to me personally.

There are some truths regarding Satan that I need you to believe and to highlight in your Bible so that you can revisit them often. First, Satan and demons are your foes and not in any way friends (1 Pet. 5:8).

Second, Satan and demons are actively at war against you (Eph. 6:10–13).

Third, Satan and demons want you to die because Satan is a murderer; he wants to bring death to everything in your life, including your love, joy, marriage, and ministry (John 8:44).

Fourth, Satan and demons have no claim to you, because you have been delivered forever from Satan's kingdom of darkness to Jesus' kingdom of light (Col. 1:13).

Fifth, in Jesus there is for you personally protection from and authority over Satan and his demons (Luke 10:18–20).

Sixth, because you are in Jesus Christ positionally and all things are under his authority, you too can command Satan and demons to obey you by the authority delegated to you from Jesus (Eph. 1:18–2:8). Practically, this simply means that if in Jesus' name you command a demon to leave you alone, it must.

Despite the fact that he is a doomed, limping enemy, the old Dragon remains crafty, as Scripture says. To fool you, Satan will use various tactics that Scripture warns us about. I want to tell you about some of these

tactics, Katie, because it is my assumption that Satan will most likely use them against you. On this point, 2 Corinthians 2:11 says that Satan cannot trick us if we become familiar with the tactics he uses against us.

Satan will lie to you because he is a liar. If you believe him, your life will be destroyed, because you will be trusting the person Jesus calls the “father of lies” (John 8:44b). Your response to lies must be reading your Bible and listening to Jesus, who throughout John’s Gospel repeatedly says, “I tell you the truth.” Furthermore, when you hear the lies, speak honestly about them with godly friends and your husband so that Jesus can speak truth into your life through them. Remember, you never have to persuade the Liar that he is wrong and you are right. Instead, be like Jesus, who, in Matthew 4:8–10, ignored the Liar’s lies and remained devoted to the truth of Scripture.

Satan will come to you when you are weak and tempt you to sin just as he did Jesus, because he is the Tempter (Matt. 4:1–11). The goal of his temptation is to draw you near to him and away from Jesus in rebellion. Your response to sinful temptation must be to resist the Devil so that he will flee from you (James 4:7–8). When you do sin, you must keep short accounts with God by repenting of your sin to Jesus and anyone else you have sinned against.

Satan will come to you as your accuser (Rev. 12:10). Satan’s accusations often come in the form of a second-person speaker. Some people who think they have psychological problems because they hear voices or have negative self-talk are in fact undergoing demonic opposition. For example, I would not be surprised if you often hear such things as “You are a slut,” “You have no right to enjoy sex with your husband,” “God could never forgive you,” “You deserve what was done to you,” and “You should just kill yourself to end your pain.” In these seasons you must realize that Jesus would never say such things to you, and if you are hearing accusations in the second person, then a demon is whispering in your ear, hoping you will believe him over Jesus.

Satan will come to you, often during a season of God’s grace being poured out, to rob you of joy by condemning you. He will remind you of past sins that Christ died for and that you have earnestly repented of. In doing so, he will attempt to get you to disbelieve in the sufficiency of Jesus’ work on the cross for you. If you believe the Dragon, you will either doubt God’s forgiveness or seek to do something in addition to

Jesus' work to merit your own forgiveness. Either way, you disbelieve in the finished work of Jesus on the cross for your sin, and you will be compelled toward either despair or religion but not toward Jesus. In these seasons, you will find an anchor for your soul by meditating on Romans 8:1, which says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Satan will use your sincere heart to heap upon you a very vague, general conviction that, if not recognized, will propel you into deep introspection as you frantically search for some sin. This is because Satan mimics God and perverts his work. God convicts you of specific sins so that, with his compassionate help, you can repent and move on to freedom and joy. Satan, however, will seek to defeat and discourage you through guilt that is so general that you never know exactly what to repent of and are thereby left in paralyzing bondage and despair. In John 8 we are told that Satan is basically an abusive parent and, like all abusive parents, his intent is not to correct you but to harm you, causing suffering and grief so that you feel destroyed without any clue as to what you have done or how to fix it.

Because so many sins of both omission and commission have been committed against you, Satan will also seek to gain ground in your life through bitterness (Eph. 4:17–32). The sad truth is that there is virtually no way that everyone who has ever sinned against you will come forward to repent and ask your forgiveness. If you wait for the people who have sinned against you to repent before you can forgive them, you will be prone to bitterness, which Hebrews 12:15 describes as a root that will feed other demonic weeds in your life.

Therefore, as God the Holy Spirit brings to mind the people who have sinned against you, you must forgive them. This does not mean minimizing or accepting what they have done, but rather entrusting them to God for his justice through Jesus' suffering on the cross or their deserved torment in hell. Your part in forgiveness is giving up your just right to hurt them for the hurt they did to you. God may also ask you to confront some of them in order to give them an opportunity to repent, and if they do not, you must trust Jesus to judge and sentence them justly on the day of final judgment.

Satan will seek to get your eyes off of Jesus. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes, "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.”

So, as my letter to you is nearing its conclusion, I would warn you that Satan has had much freedom with you because you functionally disbelieved in his existence and as a result overlooked his active work in your life. As you grow in your understanding of how Satan and demons work, however, my caution to you would be not to blame everything on them as Eve did, but rather continue to take responsibility for your own sin and entrust the punishment of those who sinned against you to the Lord.

Furthermore, because the root of Satan's work is pride, you must also continually speak, think, and act in humility, as God's grace to you requires. As Jesus said in Luke 10:20, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Katie, there is much more that could be written on this subject. But I trust that God the Holy Spirit will continually reveal to you the victory of Jesus as you read, study, and meditate on Scripture. Scripture is the sword of truth and is only useful against the Liar if it is regularly pulled from its scabbard. In closing, I would give you the following four practical steps to continue walking in joy over Satan and demons.

First, Jesus is your shield. The psalms often speak of God as our shield; remaining under Jesus Christ is your only place of safety. Therefore, the key is to walk continually and closely with Jesus, and if you should stray from under his shield to return quickly in repentance.

Second, continue in fellowship with faithful Christians who love Jesus and who will speak with you as honest friends. You will be a blessing to them as you share the things that Jesus has taught you, and they will be a blessing to you by speaking loving truth into your life and praying for you. It is no coincidence that Jesus was most tempted by Satan when he was alone. If you become isolated from God's people, you are leaving yourself open to spiritual attack. Therefore, remain actively involved in Bible-based, lovingly honest, accountable relationships, because it is indeed not good to be alone.

Third, do not be unduly fearful of Satan or demons. Satan is called a serpent, and demons are like snakes. They are dangerous only if you

pick one up or provoke one to bite. Jesus’ perfect love and kingdom victory on the cross are sufficient for you to overcome excessive fear of Satan and demons.

Fourth, pray offensively for protection and wisdom before the demonic attacks come. Too often, Christians pray defensively only when trouble comes. To help teach you how to pray this way, the book of Psalms is filled with offensive prayers. Some of my favorites include Psalm 18, Psalm 27, Psalm 31, Psalm 35, and Psalm 83. I would also suggest that you follow Jesus’ example in Matthew 4:1–10. When the Serpent attacked him, Jesus fought back by quoting Scripture that perfectly applied to the lies and temptations of the Enemy. Then, Jesus used his authority to command the Serpent to leave him. This is the same authority that Jesus has delegated to Christians so that we, too, can command Satan and demons to depart from us.

I implore you out of great love to live continually in light of the great, final defeat of Satan and demons and their servants, works, and effects at the white throne of Jesus (Revelation 20). Until that day, I pray Romans 16:20 for you, my dear sister: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Answers to Common Questions about *Christus Victor*

Can Christians be possessed by demons?

This is one of those questions that many people answer too quickly. The problem is that the word *possess* has several meanings. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary it can mean three things. First, *possess* can mean “own” so that a Christian would essentially belong to Satan. Second, *possess* can mean “dominate” so that a Christian would be controlled by Satan. Third, *possess* can mean “influence” so that the life of a Christian would be marked by the influences of Satan. Obviously, what people mean when they use the word *possessed* matters very much when answering the question, “Can Christians be possessed by demons?”

In the first sense, the Devil never *owns* a Christian. We have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son, Paul tells us in Colossians 1:13.

In the third sense, the Devil can *influence* a Christian. We are in warfare against the Enemy who seeks to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10). Even Jesus was attacked by the Devil in this way according to Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13.

It is the second sense where there is a lot of debate among Christians. Can demons dominate a Christian? While some teach that through personal sin, generational sin, or even curses, demons can have authority to dominate believers, Scripture is clear that Christians are never under the ruling authority of darkness. The Devil can never take authority over a Christian. Others teach that if we pray and feast on God's Word we never need fear a demonic attack. But if Jesus can be attacked, how can we say we cannot?

We believe Christians may be deceived, accused, or tempted by Satan and may yield to those attacks (though they do not have to). If believers begin to respond wrongly to such things, they may give demons influence in their lives. Apparently an evil spirit can empower, energize, encourage, and exploit a believer's own sinful desires. Examples would include Peter (Matt. 16:22–23) and Ananias (Acts 5:3). As children of God, regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit, we are responsible to and

empowered by God to resist Satan, and if we do resist, we need not suffer from his influence (Eph. 6:10–18; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:7–9; 1 John 4:1–4; 5:1–5, 18–19).

What can I do if a demon attacks me?

It is vital to remember that Jesus has already disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them at the cross (Col. 2:15). We don't have to do anything to win authority over a demon. That victory has already been won for us by Jesus. Our challenge is to believe and live in that authority.

Jesus is our example. When he was attacked by a demon, he refused to argue theology. Jesus didn't get into whether the Devil actually could have given him the kingdoms of this world, and he didn't ask for names or information but quoted Scripture and commanded the demon to get away (Matt. 4:1–11).

Below is a typical pattern of prayer to employ when dealing with demonically empowered desires. It is important to note that the specific wording is unimportant, because our power does not come from speaking a mantra but rather from Jesus and the truth:

1) “Lord Jesus Christ, I acknowledge that this [name the specific area of sin] may be empowered by demons and evil spirits. If it is, I want nothing to do with them.”

2) “Lord Jesus Christ, I confess that you triumphed over these demons and evil spirits by the power of your shed blood that purchased forgiveness for all my sins, and by your death, burial, and resurrection that provided my new life in you.”

3) “Lord Jesus Christ, I ask that you send any demons and evil spirits away from me. Demon, in the name and authority of Jesus, I command you to get away from me now.”

4) “Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for hearing and answering my prayer. Please fill me anew with your Holy Spirit so that I will be empowered to live in obedience to you and in freedom from sin and harassment.”

Can sins done against me defile me?

They can, as we've seen in Katie's story. But Jesus can cleanse that aspect of sin too. For example, Matthew 8 begins with Jesus healing a leper instantaneously by his power and ends with Jesus driving demons out

of two men instantaneously by his power. The point is that whether we are physically or spiritually defiled, Jesus can cleanse us. In 1 John 1:9 we are told to confess or talk about our sin. Such sin can be either sin we have committed or sin committed against us. In either case, bringing the sin to Jesus and his people will result in forgiveness of any and all guilt and cleansing of any and all defilement. The removal of defilement is usually not immediate; it is more likely to be a process, but the outcome is sure because “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2). This subject is also covered more fully in chapter 7 of this book.

I have some questions about Satan and demons. What else can I read to learn more?

For a theological summary, we recommend *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* by Clinton E. Arnold (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992). For a practical understanding, we recommend *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* by Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997); *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* by Thomas Brooks (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1968); *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); and *Lord Foulgrin's Letters* and *The Ishbane Conspiracy* by Randy Alcorn (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001; both titles).

There are many books and videos that teach that we need to know a demon's name in order to cast it out. But neither Jesus (Mark 1:23–27 is the first of many places where he did his work without appealing to a name) nor Paul (Acts 16:16–18) needed a demon's name to cast it out. Similarly, such teaching commonly argues that sin gives a demon the right to inhabit a Christian, so until we confess the sin, we cannot force the demon to leave. Because these teachings go against the Bible, however, such books must be read critically by constantly asking the question, “Where does the Bible say that?”

HELPFUL INFORMATION

In the letter to Katie, reference was made to C. S. Lewis's book *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), *ix*.