

The Subtle Snare of Self



FALL BIBLE STUDY SERIES

STRENGTH *for the Inner Man*

Be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man — Ephesians 3:16

The dictionary defines the word *self* as, “one’s own welfare, interest, or advantage.” We might not see any hidden agendas crafted by Satan lurking in that phrase, but let’s take a more careful look. When God created man, He gave him selfhood, or “the power of self-determination.” The Creator meant for that selfhood to be dependent upon Him, but with Adam and Eve’s fall, mankind withdrew his nature from dependence upon God. God was no longer the supreme center of the heart of mankind. Satan appealed to man’s pride and used self to usurp God’s place as “number one” in man’s heart. He has continued to use the same tactics in hearts throughout the centuries, and self remains at the center of man’s attention today.

How clearly we see in society today, the outcome of that original act of self-will. Self is the god of atheistic humanism and denies the true God. The goal of humanism is clearly stated in the words of a noted feminist leader, who once said that in the near future “we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God . . .”

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It is obvious that many people have put self in a position which should belong to God. As Christians, we might conclude that this is not our problem since God is in control of our lives. God certainly remains faithful to those with hearts that are pure, and who strive to align their wills with His. Satan, however, is eager to entrap each of us in some snare of self. In this lesson, we will delve into how and why a Christian deals with self, and we will take a look at how to avoid the traps used by Satan in this area.

1. When we surrender our lives to God and experience salvation, we restore our Creator to His rightful place—at the center of our existence—acknowledging His control and Lordship of our lives. When we fully consecrate our regenerated lives to God, we can expect God to cleanse our hearts with the experience of sanctification. The saved and sanctified heart has been restored to the moral quality of holiness with which Adam was created. We are not, however, restored to the physical, emotional, and mental qualities that Adam enjoyed when he was created. That is why even after we have made that initial commitment to God, we will find that new situations, fresh tests, and difficult circumstances regularly necessitate the submission of our will to His. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). If we want to continue with the Lord, we must daily avoid the danger of arranging our lives around personal interests. Using the following Scriptures, briefly outline some guidelines that will help us do this: Philippians 2:4; Luke 12:22; 1 Peter 2:11; Luke 8:14; Philippians 4:8.

2. One of the most potentially debilitating snares Satan uses is that of self-pity. He slips it into the path of the unappreciated office worker, the one suffering with pain, the tired housewife who struggles to get through a personal energy crisis, the unemployed, and the bereaved. In fact, Satan has probably tried to use the snare of self-pity, in some form, on all of us! He urges us to look inward instead of upward. “Poor you,” he whispers. “You’ll never make it. No one understands.” Have you heard those destructive words? It is sometimes easy to give in to feelings of discouragement, of being misunderstood, or of isolation, rather than to recognize those feelings as ploys of the enemy and resist them as such. What principle, outlined in Romans 8:28, will help us when Satan attempts to slip those strands of self-pity around us? Find at least one other Scripture that bears out this same thought.

3. We hear a lot about the necessity for healthy self-esteem. Certainly, it is important to recognize ourselves as unique, significant persons who are valuable to God and to others. Satan, however, would attempt to edge that self-esteem into an attitude of self-assertion, making us prone to contend for our ways and to disregard the thoughts and opinions of others. We must constantly be on guard against a preoccupation with self. This tendency can show itself through attempts to manipulate others, a desire to win every argument, a need to have the last word in any confrontation, or an attitude that everything should be arranged to fit around our plans. Paul recognized this potential danger and warned the Philippians, “. . . in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). Those words were not for first-century saints only. The advice they contain is pertinent for today. What are actions we can take to apply Paul’s admonition in our lives?

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4. Self-reliance is another character trait we often hear lauded in today's world. Our achievement-oriented society is fond of phrases like "blazing your own trail" and "marching to your own beat." Yet, there is a very real danger in relying on our own accomplishments, wisely-made investments, or well-laid plans. Satan will pat us on the back and tell us we are eminently capable of handling life on our own. His advice might be, "Do it your way," but God's Word tells us to "trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). These are important words if we want to avoid self-sufficiency. Name some Biblical examples of people who fell into the trap of relying on their own ways instead of God's, and describe the outcome of their choices. Then identify some who succeeded because they relied on God.

5. Hand-in-hand with self-reliance comes the temptation to self-indulgence. The enemy would encourage us to pamper ourselves continually, both physically and materially. He emphasizes a systematic gratification of our whims, desires, and personal preferences. When the snare of self-indulgence settles around us, forgotten are Christ's words, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). The Apostle Paul emphasized the need to keep our natural appetites and desires under control, urging us to present our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Romans 12:1). Satan's words oppose this. "It's your right!" he will insist. "You owe it to yourself. What's wrong with yearning for more in life? Isn't that just healthy ambition, just good common sense?" Why do you think he uses this reasoning?

6. Satan does not wage all his battles outside the walls of the church. He also seeks to promote an attitude of complacency and satisfaction in spiritual endeavors. He even will encourage zealous performance in God's service, as long as the power of the Holy Spirit is absent. A grievous snare of self-entangled the church of the Laodiceans, and God condemned them with the stern words, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Identify the trap implied in this passage, and describe what effect it could have on Christians today if they are not watchful.

7. Satan constantly attempts to insert self into every area of our lives: in our service to God, in our social lives; in the business world, and in the smallest to the greatest trials that we encounter. If we recognize that we are becoming entrapped by self, how should we respond? What are some steps we can take to break free and gain victory in this area?
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Key Texts

Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 16:24; Luke 8:14; 9:23; 12:22; Romans 8:28; 12:1; Philippians 2:3-4; 4:8; 1 Peter 2:11; Revelation 3:17

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Memorize

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

- Romans 13:14

Jesus
THE LIGHT *of* THE WORLD

Challenge Yourself

This lesson presented an area of our lives that Satan tries to use to gain access to our minds. Did you find yourself reacting strongly to this topic? If so, stop for a minute and challenge yourself as to how you could better serve the Lord in this area.

Other Scriptures Used

1 Samuel 16:7; Job 23:10; Psalm 37:23; Philippians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:21