A Voice From The Wilderness

Evil Surmisings or Beneficial Devisings?

Evil surmisings - what does this phrase mean? Until about a year ago I am not sure that I was even acquainted with the term, much less able to recognize that it was a part of my own experience. Then God began to show me that the thoughts I was having toward a friend - even though justifiable from my perspective - would lead to separation unless I was willing to use the principles given in God's Word to work through the difficulty between us.

Zechariah 7:10 says, "Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." To imagine or surmise evil included much more than gross or wicked thoughts about someone. It also includes untrue or misrepresentative thoughts about what I suppose someone might be thinking. It is suspecting, conjecturing or imagining what someone is thinking about me or about some situation he and I are involved in, with little or no evidence to sustain my thoughts. Stop and reflect honestly for a moment - how many times have you seen someone whispering, noticed an expression on a face, or heard a bit of gossip and immediately entertained thoughts which you later discovered were all wrong? The whisperings were in fact not about you, the expression on the face was from a recent back injury, and the gossip was a misconstrued story missing a few important details.

Friends, the sad reality is that we have been "evil surmising," we have been justifying wrong thoughts and opinions, not recognizing them to be a terrible sin in the sight of God, a sin which separates marriages, ministries, churches and best friends. Most often, at least in my experience, these surmisings result from being misunderstood, or from at least thinking I have been misunderstood. Which really means self has been crossed, and in order to preserve self I must place myself and my position in a good light and place another person's position in a bad light. Such was the situation in which my friend and I found ourselves. I began to see that if both of us refused to seek a solution to these "surmisings," barriers would come between us. Not barriers because of holding truth as it is in Jesus, but rather because of holding our opinions as they are in self. We were casting the blame and the need for change on each other. I am thankful to say that God led both of us to a resolution of this situation and a deeper understanding of the danger of "evil surmisings." Our friendship was strengthened as both of us were will-

ing to allow God to subdue self in this area of our thoughts.

God is continuing to show me the importance of my thoughts and their bearing upon my Christian experience. I may appear well-studied, pious and outwardly religious, but do my thoughts truly reveal my union with Christ? Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." We little recognize the danger of holding on to wrong thoughts about another person. Thoughts that may be true, but are held in a spirit that is hard and spiteful. These thoughts may not be the truth at all but nonetheless are believed to be true. I shudder when I realize that all our fierce battles with self, all the curse of sin with which we live began with "evil surmisings" in the mind of Lucifer toward our heavenly Father. These thoughts were entertained, nurtured and mixed with jealous feelings until Lucifer believed them. Then he began to express those "surmisings" to the pure and holy angels until one third of them decided to believe his insinuations. Today Satan uses the same methods. He insinuates doubts and evil surmisings between husbands and wives, parents and children, close friends, work associates and those in the church who may not see things as we do.

God is continuing to show me the importance of my thoughts

We would avoid much "evil surmising" if we would simply communicate with and treat others as we would like them to communicate with and treat us if circumstances were reversed. See Matthew 7:12. An illustration from my experience may help clarify what I am trying to say.

I had a recent telephone conversation with a friend. As we talked it became obvious that there was a misunderstanding between us. As my friend shared his side of the story and his view of circumstances which involved me, I could see why he was struggling with "evil surmising" toward me. I was thankful that he was honest with me about what he had heard, but was saddened that he had entertained these thoughts about me for so long, without finding out whether he was holding a correct view of what had taken place. However, I tried to put myself in his position. I told him that I could understand why he had drawn the conclusion he had. At the same time I told him I was confident that when he heard the full story, by putting himself in my position, he would see that it was not as he had imagined it to be. Unfortunately, at this point my friend became less open to seeing my side of the picture or listening carefully to my perspective. This reaction left me wishing I had never tried to discuss my position at all.

Friends, that telephone conversation left me with wounded feelings, and "evil surmisings" of my own began to crop up in my thoughts. Now I found myself in a real mind battle, in the greatest battle I face, with my greatest enemy - self. I had a wounded self. A self that wanted to justify its position. A self that wanted to be preserved when it had been crossed. I was bombarded with thoughts like these: "How come I have to yield self? Why can't he? I listened to him and tried to understand his perspective. Why would he not do the same for me?" Then I heard the Spirit remind me, "When self is unsubdued, there can be no rest." God was drawing me to realize that my real battle was with an unsubdued self, not with being misinterpreted or misunderstood by my friend.

As I was willing to place my power of choice on the side of doing God's will, He began to remind me of the eight principles that I had been practicing since my eyes were opened to the dangers of "evil surmisings." I call these eight principles "**beneficial devisings**" and have found them to be useful, practical tools in fighting the temptation to entertain gossip, evil reports, evil thoughts, misrepresentations of others and so on. I have them written in my Bible and encourage you to write them in yours and use them at the first temptation to fall into Satan's trap. They are as follows:

1) Banish the thought by communion with God. I have found that I cannot be in union with Christ and communion with God while holding onto wrong thoughts about something or someone, even if the thoughts might be true. Remember Philippians 4:8? "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

2) Pray for that person. You and I do not know the struggles and temptations another may be bending under. If we did we would probably have compassion on him.

Luke 6:28 says, "Pray for them which despitefully use you."

3) Ask God to show me my part in the problem. We are prone to cast blame rather than include ourselves in the examining process. If we cannot pray for the other person, we surely will not be willing for God to show us our problem. Psalms 139:23 says, "Search me, O God and know my heart."

4) Pray for God to work in their heart, if the problem is real. If we have been willing to pray for them and to ask God to search our hearts, now we can honestly ask God to show them their problem, and for Him to work in their heart. Remember, if the Holy Spirit is not able to convict and convince, then how can I? Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

5) Think of the blessings that have come through this person. Often "evil surmisings" can cloud the memory, preventing it from recalling the blessings that have come to us from the one we are entertaining an evil or misrepresentative thought toward. But a decided choice - by faith - can bring good out of apparent evil. Even if there are no blessings from the past, God has a blessing in the present circumstance of trial. Genesis 50:20 says, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

6) Ask God for a self-abasing, self-subduing love for that person. We cannot put that kind of love into our own experience, but the Lord that we profess to serve will impart it to us, if we truly desire to reveal Him to others. Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find."

7) Begin immediately to serve their needs. Let us show them that we are more interested in understanding and serving their needs than we are in serving self. We do not have to be with them to do this; even in our thoughts, we can hold a sweet spirit toward them. We can express our care with a call or letter of genuine encouragement. The point is that they will see now, maybe for the first time, the spirit of a true Christian, one who is allowing Christ to work in him against the strong pulls of self. Romans 12:21 says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

8) Be thankful; God often uses those who know us best and love us most to reveal the self that still subdues us. God could use much more severe means and He will if necessary (as He did with Israel of old) to show us our true condition. But, friends, let us learn the lesson through those who love us. I am learning that I need not be so concerned about who or what causes self to want to rise; but rather will I address the real battle with the self that is wanting to rise in me. Too often we want to do battle with the one who has wounded self, instead of with the real enemy, self.

Now that we have some useful tools for dealing with the temptation of "evil surmising," does it mean we need never go to another person to reconcile a misunderstanding or difficulty between us? No! Matthew 18:15 says, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." You will notice it does not say that we should go to others about our brother's fault.

May God help us to cooperate with Him

May God help us to cooperate with Him by beginning to use His principles in dealing with one another. Yes, we need to go to others, but we need to go to them with the right motives and spirit. Are we going to them to prove them wrong and set them straight, to show them we are right? If so, even if we are right and they are wrong, we will not win and restore our brother. We need to go to others with a desire and intent to restore harmony between us and to unite our souls to God. How sad I feel as I reflect upon times when I have gone to someone with a right answer, the truth, but the wrong spirit. They were wrong and I showed them their error, but I was not myself experiencing the sanctifying truth or the living connection to the Saviour I professed to be representing with such zeal. Consider this thought, "Not until you feel that you could sacrifice your own self-dignity, and even lay down your life in order to save an erring brother, have you cast the beam out of your own eye so that you are prepared to help your brother. Then you can approach him and touch his heart." *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing 128-9.*

Friends, this is not a guarantee that our differences will be resolved, but it is guaranteed as the most effective means to accomplish that end, if both persons are sensitive to the Spirit. Too often we go into a conversation hoping to resolve a problem but carrying preconceived "evil surmisings" with us. We come to the conversation with

misrepresentations of the other person's position and thoughts. This has happened to me, and I have had to deal honestly with myself.

My wife and I received a phone call from a couple who were facing a difficult experience in their home. They wanted us to be open and share some principles that they could apply to their needs. We shared some principles that cut very close and would require some serious changes if results were to be seen. We did not hear from them for several months and I began to be tempted to "surmise" what they must be thinking. (A dangerous thing to do.) I was quite sure they were offended and we probably would not be hearing from them anymore. But the Lord gently reproved me for these thoughts and reminded me of the love I had for them and the spirit in which the suggestions had been made. Some time later we received a call that they were in the area and wanted to stop by. My old "surmisings" came into my mind as I imagined the visit, and again I had to respond to the appeals of the Spirit to put away the thoughts. We had a nice visit and near the close the wife said, "Oh, by the way, I want to apologize for not communicating with you after our last phone conversation. We actually began implementing the suggestions that very night and have had tremendous results, but we've been so busy that we haven't had time to communicate." I confessed the thoughts I had been tempted by and was so thankful I had not harbored those thoughts against them.

How sad that we as professed Christians are found harboring misrepresentative thoughts toward another person. We get a thought in our minds and we entertain it until we begin to believe it is true. Such thinking can destroy the best relationships, the strongest friendships. We need to know the seriousness of the sin of misrepresenting the thoughts and motives of others. In *The Upward Look 122*, we find these strong words. "This sin is worse than the sin of Achan. Its influence is not confined to those who cherish it. It is a root of bitterness, whereby many are defiled. God cannot bless the church till it is purged of this evil that corrupts minds and spirits." Friends, too often we have been more concerned about ridding "the camp" of everyone else's sin while we bypass the examination of our own heart before God. Yes, it is time to get the sin out of the camp, but to do so, it begins by dealing with myself first. I must start with my "evil surmisings," which are "worse than the sin of Achan." We need to be asking ourselves whether our profession of Christ, of being a "Christian," is in harmony with all of our thoughts. Are we entertaining "evil surmisings" about others who may not see things as we do? Can we really be in union with Christ and hold opinions of others based on hear say? Even if our opinions are true, is our intention to encourage and restore? If we are Christ's, our desire will be to bring our thoughts into harmony with Him, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Finally, consider these words from *The Upward Look 117*: "Envy, evil surmising, backbiting, and faultfinding - let none of these be named among Christ's disciples. These are the cause of the present feebleness of the church."

Because I know that none of us wants to contribute to "the present feebleness of the church," I invite each of you right now to take time, right where you are, and ask God whether you are holding any evil thoughts, any thoughts out of harmony with Christ toward anyone. Then go back and review the eight simple steps and begin to cooperate with God by turning those "evil surmisings" into "beneficial devisings" for the honor of God, the blessing of others and the peace of your own conscience.

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