The Organized Power of Sin

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About fifteen years ago Lisa, my wife, felt a lump in her breast. Almost immediately my mind got bombarded with devastating thoughts. It was almost nonstop; everything from what type of cancer it could be, how we would pay for treatment, to what if she didn't make it, and even funeral plans.

As long as I was awake the thoughts coming into my brain were relentless. The thoughts didn't stop scrolling until she was diagnosed with a cyst and it was aspirated in the doctor's office. She didn't even have to go to the hospital.

How is it that sometimes we feel harassed by evil thoughts from the time we get up until the time we go to bed—constantly bombarded with degrading, sinful, condemning, and downright unholy thoughts? Those thoughts were useless, negative chatter inside my head.

But where does it come from? There are only a few possible sources: the Holy Spirit, the new self/new creation, or the power of sin in my flesh.

The Holy Spirit would not have fabricated all those false thoughts. Nor does the new self or new creation have the capacity to generate such nonsense; because it has been made holy, blameless, perfect, justified, forgiven, and sanctified!

Wouldn't it be easy if it were coming through your earbuds, you could just turn them off.

Some of those shocking, off-the-wall thoughts have made many of us even question our salvation. How could a believer transformed by the power of God have such awful thoughts slithering around in their head? Has that happened to you?

You'll be excited to know you aren't alone in this. Look around you. Every person in this room experiences the same thing. There is only one possible source and that's the one we will focus upon—the power of sin.

The apostle Paul writes about this dilemma in Romans seven…

"For I do not understand what I am doing; I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:15).

He goes on to say, *"So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me"* (Rom. 7:17).

He is not blaming what he does on *"sin which indwells"* him, but he is blaming "sin" in his body for waging war against his mind (Rom. 7:23).

According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, the word for "sin" here is *hamartia* in the Greek—a noun, not a verb; a thing not an action. Vine describes it as:

"…a governing principle or power, e.g., Romans 6:6, '(the body) of sin,' here 'sin' is spoken of as an organized power, acting through the members of the body, though the seat of 'sin' is in the will (the body is the organic instrument)…this governing principle is personified…"

For the sake of clarity let's call this organized power or force that Paul talks about in our body the "power of sin" because it is a noun and we'll simply call the disobedient acts committed in our body "sin" because it is most often a verb.

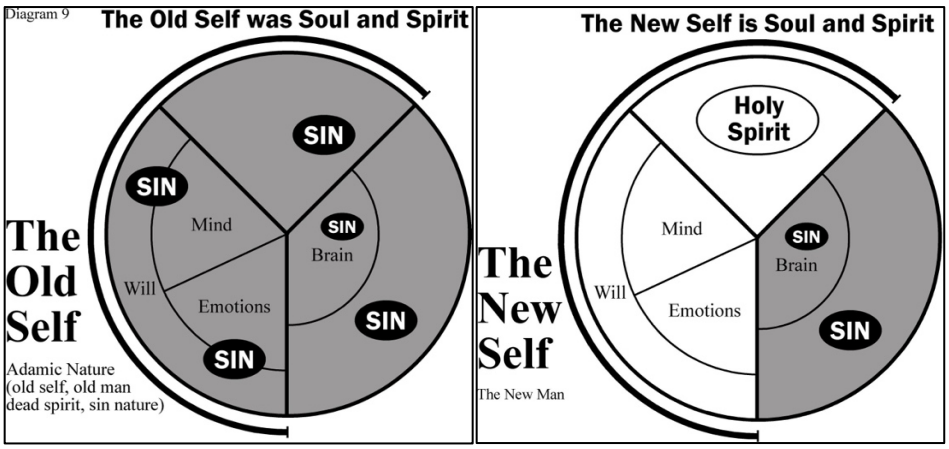
Before we go any further, it might be helpful to understand where this organized power or force came from. Paul tells us in Romans 5:12 that (the organized power of) sin and death entered the world through Adam when he sinned (Gen. 3). Sin and death spread to all mankind because all sinned in Adam. In Adam all die (1Cor. 15:21-22).

Adam and Eve later have children—born in Adam's image, dead in their sin, separated from God (Eph. 2:1, 5); as were their children and the next generation, and every generation throughout history, including you and me.

Soon after that we read of Cain in his anger contemplating the murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:7). This is where we see the very first appearance of the "organized power of sin."

"And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:7)

This organized power is not a demon or a being, but like a parasite in your brain that can't be removed. It is an organized power—a force every one of us inherited when we sinned in Adam. Lovely thought, huh?



As believers, the power of sin was eradicated from our soul and spirit when we put our faith in Jesus (Rom. 6:6, 2Cor. 5:17, Gal. 2:20). Our old self was made new. Unfortunately, not much

changed in our fleshly body at salvation—actually, nothing. The "organized power of sin" still resides there and has access to your brain because it is part of your body.

Those sometimes vile and often subtle thoughts come from the power of sin whose purpose aligns with the enemy of your soul, *"to kill, and steal, and destroy"* (John 10:10). The evil thoughts, temptations and trickery are literally intended to destroy you. Much of the battle is won realizing those thoughts aren't generated by us. This truth will produce an awesome amount of freedom in your life. It did mine.

Paul also mentions this aspect of spiritual warfare in 2Cor. 10:5,

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every <u>thought</u> captive to the obedience of Christ." (2Cor. 10:5)

Before we believed, while our soul and spirit were still separated from God (Eph. 2:1, 5) we had little choice but to follow the suggestions of the "power of sin." It dwelled in all parts of our being. Now that we have been raised in the newness of life in Jesus (Rom. 6:4-5) the "power of sin" no longer resides in the soul and spirit, giving you the freedom to say "no" to its ugly suggestions, accusations, and temptations.

So, when you have thoughts of inadequacy, doubt, fear, condemnation, temptation, pride, or anything contrary to who God says He is or who you are, be aware that neither you nor He generated that idea. It came straight from the "power of sin" in your flesh (brain) trying to destroy you. It was super encouraging when I discovered I'm not the one generating those thoughts.

Those lies usually (but not always) come in first person to trick you into believing it was you who generated the thought. Here are some examples:

"I can't believe I said that. I am a sick, sick person."

"I am so amazing! None of my coworkers can do what I do."

"My nose is so huge. I am so ugly. No one will ever love me."

"They must have been talking about me."

"Nobody really wants to be my friend."

"I should be the one leading that group. Nobody knows this stuff like I do."

"I could slip that into my pocket, and no one would know."

If you've had thoughts of harming yourself, do you think those were generated by your new self or spirit? Nope…directly from the power of sin.

This week a camper made me aware of another trick of the POS—creating thoughts that question the character of God. God never shies away from questions, even about His character. Questions are never bad and this question was certainly valid. But if you are constantly bombarded with a God question you don't have an answer for, it is probably the POS attempting to drive a wedge between you and Jesus.

Naomi in the story of Ruth is a good example of what this organized power of sin can do if you allow it to operate unchecked in your life. You know the story…but when Naomi returns with Ruth from the land of Moab, listen to the things that she says and see if you can identify the lies she has believed.

"…No, my daughters; for it is much more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has come out against me." (Ruth 1:13)

Possible lies: "I am being punished for my sin." "The Lord doesn't love me, or this wouldn't have happened."

Then again when she and Ruth return to Bethlehem…

"…Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (Ruth 1:20-21)

Possible lies: "The Lord has taken everything away from me." "The Lord is against me. I must be His enemy."

Naomi believed the lies the power of sin had been feeding her. Those lies transformed her mental state, her relationship with God, and even her appearance. Those lies had so become her identity that the people of Bethlehem hardly recognized her when she returned ten years later.

By the time someone verbalizes the power of sin's storyline, they have been considering those illicit thoughts for a long time.

The story of Ruth and Naomi has an awesome ending. Even though she didn't understand the power of sin's operation in her life, Father redeemed her as well, not just Ruth. He rescued his precious daughter Naomi and restored her faith by countering the lies that she had believed about herself and her God.

How do we take those thoughts captive? Actually, I should say, "How do we take those <u>lies</u> captive?" You counter a lie with truth! The first step is to:

1. **Identify the lie**. That means understanding the source and recognizing it as contrary to who God says He is and who you are. In every instance when Jesus was tempted, Satan attacked His identity (Luke 4:1-13). Virtually every lie will be a temptation or a subtle attack on your identity.

2. **Recognize the source**. If the thoughts entering your brain are in any way contrary to who God says you are, or condemning, or they are tempting you to sin, or they are falsely self-promoting, then you are <u>not</u> the source. The born again, new creation cannot produce such thoughts, nor does the Spirit of God within you.

Let that sink in for a second and you will realize how much you and I have allowed the power of sin to abuse our brain. Any evil thought that enters your brain has been generated by the power of sin, not your redeemed, new creation. The new you has been created holy and blameless (Col. 1:22)—the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2Cor. 5:21).

3. **Apply truth**. Jesus not only knew Who He was, He used truth/Scripture to counter the lie when Satan tempted Him (Luke 4:1-13). Sometimes it is enough to respond to the lie or temptation with, “That’s not who I am” or “I wasn’t built for that.” But to be truly victorious over that organized power of sin in your flesh, use Scripture as Jesus did.

Memorize Scriptures that will counter the lies the power of sin throws at you.

4. **Repeat**. Be on constant alert for the POS’ lies. Every time a thought from the organized power of sin enters your brain, take it captive and respond with truth. You’ll find that those lies become less and less frequent the more you respond with truth.

Prayer of response:

Father, reveal the lies we have believed about you, ourselves, and others. Show us truth to defeat the power of sin’s lies. Help us recognize its attempts to program us against you. In Jesus’ name, amen.