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**JANUARY 2017**  
**THE LITTLE FOXES THAT SPOIL THE VINES**

Greeting saints of God!

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God the Father and of God the Son!

Last month, we deviated from our regular Living Logos teaching newsletters to send out information about our ministry and how you can support it. And so I wanted to, first of all, thank each and every one of you who responded with either a one-time gift or by committing to partner together with us! We really appreciate it!

But I would also like to take the time to thank each and every one of you who supported Living Logos Ministries throughout 2016! We sincerely appreciate all of our partners for your continued support of this ministry. We cannot fully express how much your monetary gifts and prayers mean to us; not just in the obvious spiritual and natural ways that they help and benefit us, but also in how they show your faith in what God has called us to. Your faith in LLM means a lot to us! So, Shannon, Levi and I pray God's abundant provision and supernatural protection upon you and yours for your fellowship in the gospel. Amen!

Well, in this month's Living Logos I want us to take a look at what I consider to be one of the most important messages you could ever hear as a believer and one that I believe we need to have a steady diet of. The reason I am so adamant about this is because it is one of the deadliest devices that the enemy has and uses to destroy our lives.

So let's begin by looking at a very eye opening verse in the Song of Solomon...

**LITTLE FOXES**

In this book of the Bible entitled the Song of Solomon we have a romantic love story between a man and woman. However, it is rather obvious that this book is meant to be a type and shadow of the church's love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I encourage you that as you read through this particular book of the Bible, don't read it with a carnal veil over your eyes, only seeing it as a romantic love story between a man and woman that occurred several thousands of years ago, but read it as an Holy Spirit inspired book that illustrates this new and better covenant that you and I live in. Yes, read it as a love story between the Christ and His bride, the church.

Now in chapter two and verse fifteen Solomon writes- "Catch us the foxes the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes."

Now if you look back in chapter one and verse six we are told how the woman was the keeper of the vineyards. So this passage of Scripture is an admonishment from Christ to His bride to "catch the foxes!" So how does this apply to us?

Well, the vineyards here are symbolic of our hearts because oftentimes the Lord used the soil to illustrate the ground of our hearts (see the Parable of the Sower). And Solomon also says in Proverbs 4:23 that our heart is where all the issues of our life flow from. Therefore, we need to guard the gardens of our heart above everything else we guard. But why? Because there are little foxes out there that are going to try and spoil and steal the good fruit that our hearts try to produce.

Now as I just alluded to, the fruit that these vines produced were a type of the fruit that we as Christians are to produce in our lives. So we can see that if we want to be fruitful believers, then we need to guard our gardens (or, vineyards) with all diligence to keep our harvest from being spoiled by these "little foxes." Amen?

So then the question should arise- What are these “little foxes” symbolic of? Well, to answer this question, let’s first consider the nature and characteristics of foxes... By nature, foxes are very cunning, sly, crafty, and mischievous. In other words, you could say that foxes are skilled at flying below the radar. And I believe this is the specific characteristic of a fox that Solomon was referring to here in this passage of Scripture because he goes on to refer to them as “little foxes.”

You see, foxes were known in those days for their destructive tendencies in crop fields, and these little foxes used their slyness to enter into the vineyards to do their damage. In fact, we are told in Judges 15:4 that there were a great number of these destructive foxes in Judea in those days. And just as there were many foxes in the land of God’s people back then, likewise there are many foxes that will try and invade the lives of God’s people today.

So, again, what are these little foxes a type of? Well, with these vineyards describing our hearts and their fruit describing our production for God, I believe the “little foxes” here are symbolic of what many Christians consider to be the “little sins.”

You see, many believers look at certain sins like they are not that big of a deal and at the sins such as adultery, murder, and drunkenness as the “big sins.” This could not be further from the truth, saints! Religion is what has placed such an emphasis on some sins and not as much on others. You see, religion likes to look on the outward appearance and actions while ignoring the condition of the heart, but this is what Jesus came to expose. Jesus emphasized time and time again what was going on in the heart of man and spent much less time dealing with the more obvious and blatant sins.

Therefore, because the Song of Solomon 2:15 says that it is the little foxes that actually spoil our vines, we can see that the enemy is not always going to attempt to oppose our spiritual progress with the temptations that are big and obvious. We see here that he will use subtle and seemingly insignificant little foxes to spoil our spiritual production!

So what I want to talk to you about today are the cunning and sly sins that hinder our spiritual production the most- the sins of strife, bitterness, offense, and unforgiveness. And although I am referring to them as “little foxes” this month, they are actually the most dangerous and deadly devices that Satan will tempt us with. And the reason they are so deadly is because these “little foxes” are what give Satan an advantage over us. Let me explain this by looking over at 2 Corinthians 2:11...

### **SATAN’S ADVANTAGE**

In 2 Corinthians 2:11, the Apostle Paul said, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” Some of us are familiar with this commonly used spiritual warfare scripture, but what many have never considered is the context of it. In context, the Apostle Paul was telling the Corinthian church that they needed to forgive an offender from their church that caused them grief. So in context, the specific “device” that the enemy was using to harm this church was unforgiveness. Therefore, we can see that one of the devices that the devil will also attempt to use to infiltrate our hearts today is that little fox of *unforgiveness*.

You see, we are repeatedly taught throughout the Scriptures to forgive as God has forgiven us. And the Scriptures are very explicit that in refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters of the offenses that they commit against us, we are in danger of not being forgiven ourselves. So the matter of unforgiveness is obviously a very serious thing. And the enemy knows this, saints! Therefore, what he will do is continuously tempt us to not forgive one another because He knows that by us yielding to unforgiveness, he can “spoil our vines.”

Now notice what the Apostle Paul said in this Scripture that Satan’s devices (i.e. unforgiveness, offense, bitterness, and strife) are designed to do: He said that they give him an “advantage” over us.

You see, in Christ Jesus, we have complete authority over Satan and his cohorts, but when we submit ourselves to these “little foxes” (such as unforgiveness) we are in turn submitting ourselves to Satan’s rule (see Romans 6:16). Needless to say, this is not something we can afford to do because we are no match for the enemy in our own strength. It is only through our communion and fellowship with Christ that we will rule and reign over darkness. So keeping ourselves in the love of God is imperative to keeping the advantage we have over him. Amen?

You see, one of the most important things we can learn in regards to unforgiveness is that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the unseen spirits of darkness (see Ephesians 6:12). This is extremely important to understand because if our focus is on the person who has offended us and not on the spirit who inspired them to hurt us then we can, in fact, be wrestling the shadow of the problem and not the problem itself. This is how Satan takes advantage of us, my friends!

Just think about it: If you are wrestling against the shadow of your opponent, then they will have the advantage in your fight with them, right? Likewise, when we look at the person as the problem and take our anger out on them, we are allowing the enemy to gain the advantage over us. Saints, never forget: **Satan takes advantage of unforgiveness.**

But, you see, unforgiveness is not the only “little fox” that Satan uses to spoil our vines. He also uses another little fox called *bitterness*. Let’s look over at Hebrews 12:15 and see the dangers of allowing bitterness to take root in our hearts...

### THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS

Hebrews 12:15 says, “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled”

Now it is important for us to realize that, according to this Scripture, it is possible for a born again believer who has become a partaker of God’s amazing grace, to fall short of it. How, you ask? Let’s look at what the author of Hebrews says in the rest of this verse...

First of all, this verse goes on to say “lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; *lest any root of bitterness springing up...*” This phrase shows us something very important. It indicates to us where bitterness begin: it begins in our hearts!

You see, bitterness is completely unseen like a root is underground and unseen. And, my friends, we need to deal with this before it takes root because if it’s not dealt with when it is only a surface issue (i.e. an initial thought), it can begin to take root in our hearts and become harder to deal with. An example that I think illustrates this best is acorns in the Fall...

You see, when acorns initially begin to accumulate on the ground, this is the best time to collect them because if you wait, they will begin to take root and then become much harder to clean up. And as Hebrews 12:15 goes on to say, once they take root, they are then capable of “springing up.”

Now this “springing up” primarily occurs in the mouth. You see, bitterness is a heart issue and it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. So when we allow bitter thoughts to take root in our hearts, they will typically begin to “spring up” out of our mouths. And, friends, this is one of the greatest ways to discern the condition of our hearts, and we would do good to regularly do this. Why? Because by taking an inventory of what we let slip out of our mouths, we would get a good idea of what was in our hearts. For instance, if we find ourselves constantly speaking negatively of someone, then we just might have allowed bitterness to take root in our hearts towards that person.

## POISONED BY BITTERNESS

And then notice what Hebrews 12:15 says is the result of that root of bitterness springing up: He said it will “cause trouble.”

You see, this is exactly what a bitter person does- they *cause trouble*. In other words, they become the source of contention in their church, work place, home, etc. You could say that bitter people are “strife starters” because they will gossip and slander, tearing others down.

Friends, this is an extremely serious thing with God! Many people consider these “little foxes” to not be as big of a deal as the “big sins,” but if you look at the sins that are considered abominable to God in Proverbs 6:16-19, you will find “sowing discord among the brethren” right up there with lying, murder, etc.

Church, God absolutely hates strife! Therefore, we need to develop this hatred for it as well. We need to allow zero tolerance for strife in our homes, churches, etc. We need to do our best to guard our hearts from feelings of animosity and resentment, and, by all means, never allow ourselves to utter anything remotely close to slanderous or defaming of our brothers and sisters in Christ. To be honest with you, it is in our best interest to never allow anything negative about somebody to come out our mouths at all. I personally would rather be caught in that ditch than tinkering around on the other side, which is dangerous ground. Someone might ask, “Trey, what kind of dangerous ground are you talking about?”

Well, if you look over at James 3:16 you will find a truth about strife that should cause you to avoid it like the plague it is. It says, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”

This verse tells us that where you find these little foxes of “envy and strife” you will find disharmony, confusion and also every evil work. And notice that James doesn’t just say some evil works, but he says every evil work. Some examples of “*evil works*” are sickness, disease, infirmities, poverty and lack. Basically an evil work would be considered anything and everything that has come into this world as a result of sin and the curse. So this means that when we allow these “little foxes” such as strife to come into our lives, it packs it’s bags full of all these evil works and brings them with him. This would be similar to how, in the natural, these little foxes might bring certain diseases with them. Friends, this is what Ephesians 4:27 means when it says that we can “give place to the devil” in our lives. Why? Because when you give these little foxes place in your hearts, they spread their diseases.

You see, there are many believers out there who love Jesus and serve Him faithfully but have allowed strife into their homes. As a result, they are struggling against some of these “evil works” and do not understand why they are experiencing such difficult circumstances in their lives. And while we do need to understand that all difficulties we encounter are not necessarily a result of someone yielding to these “little sins,” the fact remains that some of them can be.

I have had to deal with countless Christians over my Christian walk with whom this is the case. They request prayer for their health, marriage, and finances and just in the short period of time that I listen to them, I hear bitterness, offense, and unforgiveness in their voice. In many of those cases, I have had to minister along these same lines with them and tell them that the problem is not with God or even with the devil (as they suppose). Their problem is with themselves because they have allowed those “little foxes” to dig holes in their heart and make their bed there! Friends, **a lot of times our biggest enemy is the condition of our “inner-me.”**

But, you see, not only do you defile your own life when you yield to these “little foxes,” Hebrews 12:15 winds up by stating- “and by this many become defiled.”

The word “defiled” here means “to pollute, corrupt, or stain.” This means that when we allow these “little foxes” to corrupt us, they will eventually “spring up” out of us and begin to corrupt others as well. This is what David meant in Psalm 34:13 when he said, “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.” In the Hebrew language, the words “speaking deceit” denote “spreading poison.” You see, when we go around gossiping and backbiting what we are really doing in the spirit realm is spreading poison into our audience’s heart- just like those rabid foxes spread their diseases wherever they go.

This is why there have been times when someone has said or done something that was wrong and I have purposely not told anyone. Why? Because not only is it in my best interest to avoid any form of slander, but it is also good for those that my flesh would love to tell. Why is that? Because if I told them then they would have the same temptation to judge, criticize, or be offended with that person that I did. What I am telling you here is really no different than us drinking some poison and then going around and forcing others to drink it too. Friends, we need to think about what we are telling other people instead of just spreading poison around and defiling others.

### **HOW TO CATCH THE LITTLE FOXES**

So now that we have diagnosed the problem, let’s look at the Scriptural solution for dealing with these “little foxes that spoil the vines”...

You see, back in Song of Solomon 2:15 we are told to “Catch the foxes...” So how do we do this? Well, first of all, let’s look back at the beginning of Hebrews 12:15 and notice the first couple of words that the Lord included in this verse- “looking carefully.”

The words “looking carefully” are the same words used to translate the word “bishop” in other New Testament Scriptures. This means that we must “oversee” our own heart as a “bishop” oversees his own church in order to *catch* the little foxes that would try to spring up and cause trouble. Amen!

So by simply being more sober and vigilant concerning these things we can effectively catch many of these little foxes when they try to sneak into our hearts. But the fact is, with carefully watching over our hearts will come times where we will have to fight off many of these little foxes from getting into our gardens.

So what I want to do in the remainder of this Living Logos is look at some biblical principles that show us how to practically catch these little foxes. These principles will work with dealing with both the offense at its onset and also with getting rid of the bitterness and unforgiveness that we might have already embraced...

But what needs to be said first is that the basis for all our forgiveness of others is the love and mercy of God. His example of forgiving each and every one of us should be the driving force that motivates us to forgive others. The Scriptures teach us very clearly that we are to forgive others as God has forgiven us (see Colossians 3:13).

You see, it is through understanding the enormous debt which God forgave us of that we can effectively forgive others of the much lesser debt we feel they owe us! Of course, there will always be the people who do not see the hurt they suffered as “minor” and feel like the offense they experienced is too big to forgive. But the truth is, no matter what somebody else did to them- whether it be some sort of mental, physical, or sexual abuse, whether it be some sort of a violation of their trust, or whether it be even the taking of the life of someone they loved- it can in no way compare to the enormous amount of sin each and every one of us had against God. The problem is that we do not see how much our sin cost Jesus at the cross. The problem is that we do not see how ugly and horrible our sin really was. If we could see these things through God’s eyes, forgiving others would come much easier. Jesus gave us a parable that shows how much worse our debt to God was than any debt man could have towards us (see Matthew 18:22-35). There is no comparison! So the Christian that decides to not forgive their brother and sister is the Christian who more than likely just lacks the revelation of how much they have been forgiven of.

So with this truth as our foundation, what are some biblical principles we can operate in that will enable us to forgive and let go of offenses? In Luke 6:27-28, Jesus gave us three practical admonitions that I want us to take a look at:

- ✓ The first thing Jesus said was to do good to those who hurt you. How are we to respond when someone hurts us? We are to do good to them! We do this through maybe baking them some cookies, taking them out to dinner, buying them a gift, anonymously sending them money, etc. And there are many other ways in which we can do good to people that hurt us.
- ✓ The next thing Jesus said was to bless those who curse you. The word “curse” just simply means to speak negatively of someone. So what do you think “bless” means? You guessed it- to speak positively of someone. So when people are bad-mouthing us, our response should be to speak good things about them. And if you can’t think of anything good about them (which is highly unlikely), make faith-filled confessions. 😊
- ✓ And, last but not least, He said to pray for those who spitefully use you. Notice that Jesus did not say, “pray against those...” My point is that when Jesus said to pray for them, He was intending for us to pray on behalf of them. In other words, to pray for them like they would pray for themselves. The words “spitefully use” simply mean to mistreat. So when you feel like you are being mistreated, your response should be to sincerely pray blessings upon their life.

You see, when we apply the correct biblical responses to these little foxes that try and come into our lives, there is an anointing that is released that enables us to love and forgive them. It is not enough to just try and fend off these little foxes through our own self effort. We need to be doers of what the Lord told us to do when people offend us and then, and only then, will we be 100% successful at guarding our vineyards from being corrupted. In other words, by fulfilling these three commands of Jesus when we are bad-mouthed, hurt, or mistreated we will effectively “catch the little foxes” of bitterness, offense, and unforgiveness before they can corrupt our vineyards.

Saints, we need to avoid these sly and subtle foxes at all costs! Allowing them to infiltrate our hearts we cause certain destruction of our lives if they are not dealt with. These little foxes are spiritual cancer- They may seem small and insignificant, but they will eventually destroy our entire garden if not dealt with. Give them no place in your heart! Selah!

Victoriously,

