

## Foundations of the Spiritual Life (4)

### How to overcome the devil?

#### Readings

- **James 4: 7, 8**

*‘Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.’*

- **Revelation 12: 10, 11**

*‘Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.’*

#### **Overcoming the devil requires three essential things:**

- The power of redemption
- The word of God
- The spiritual weapons

Other things mentioned in the bible regarding overcoming the devil can be included under these 3 main headings.

The bible entreats us to resist the devil and tells us that when we resist him, he will flee from us.

*How then can we resist the devil?*

It is through the above mentioned three main things.

As a basic principle, when the bible tells us a truth, this means that it is practically applicable. Therefore, if the bible tells us to resist the devil, this means it is within the ability of every person to do so and it also means that the devil will truly flee from us.

God regulates and organises the relationships in His Kingdom. God is the Highest King of the visible kingdoms of the earth and of the unseen kingdoms, among which is the kingdom of darkness. God is the Ruler of the Kingdom of light (of His children); He is Ruler over the Kingdom of darkness (of the devil); and He is also Ruler over the human kingdoms of the earth. In Revelation 1: 5, we read that Jesus Christ is *'the ruler over the kings of the earth'*.

Because God is righteous and just, even the devil, who opposes God, submits to the precepts and judgements of God. There are no gaps or flaws in these judgements; and so, the devil cannot contradict them or hold charge against them. However, the devil takes advantage of these precepts and tries to exploit them against the children of God. As humans, we are often ignorant of God's laws and statutes and we do not understand them. As a result, the devil succeeds in deceiving us.

***One of these divine laws and precepts is that God does not allow anyone to be tempted beyond what they are able (1Corinthians 10: 13).***

*Who is the tempter?*

*‘God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed’ (James 1: 13, 14).*

The devil is behind the temptations. One of the names of the devil is: *‘the tempter’*. Apostle Paul writes: *‘lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labour might be in vain’* (1Thessalonians 3: 5).

When the bible tells us that we will not be tempted beyond what we are able, this means that no one will face a power of darkness that is more powerful than him/her. Since the tempter is the devil, this verse simple indicates that God will not allow anyone to face a power of the kingdom of darkness beyond what he/she are able. In other words, God will not allow one to face a temptation beyond his ability.

*What is the temptation?*

It can be certain circumstances that one goes through.

*Who is behind these circumstances?*

The powers of darkness are behind this.

However, there is a biblical principle that none of us will face a power or a rank of the kingdom of darkness beyond his ability to resist.

God will not allow one of his children whose spiritual level/stature is one meter to face an evil power that is three meters tall. The bible talks about the giants on earth (Genesis 6) and about Goliath who was over 3 meters tall. This means that there are certain powerful ranks in the kingdom of darkness, if described in our material language, they will be the giants of

earth. Behind those giants who faced the people of God in the Old Testament at various eras were high ranks of the powers of darkness.

Of course, the devil wants to destroy. However, God has laws and rules.

*Who should be watchful that these laws would be implemented?*

On earth, His Church is responsible for that; while in heaven, the angels and saints are responsible for that. Sometimes, we do not carry out our responsibilities, but the angels always do.

Therefore, if one of God's children is about to be faced by a strong power of darkness bigger/greater than him, the angels will immediately face this strong power and push it away telling it that it has no right to face that person as there are rules. The rule that regulates this matter is that no one will be tempted beyond his ability; and so, this strong power has no right to face this small child of God. Therefore, the angels would push it away.

If our spiritual insight was open, we would have been able to see that there were many temptations that never reached us because the angels and saints faced them and finished the battle before reaching us.

All these matters submit to the laws of the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of God, the King. He is righteous in all His ways and merciful in all His works (Psalm 145: 17). He continues to be fair to us and to the devil until the Day of Judgment when everyone, both humans and the devils, will be judged according to God's faithfulness and righteousness and according to His laws.

Since I will never face a power bigger than me, this means I have the ability to overcome.

I should keep these principles in my mind; namely:

- I will never face an evil power bigger than me.
- If an evil power confronts or attacks me, I have the ability to overcome it.
- Therefore, if for some reason I am overcome by a power that faces me, this indicates a certain shortcoming on my part. This can be lack of knowledge and understanding of the divine principles, or the strategies of the devil, the spiritual weapons and the resources granted to me; or, it can be lack of faithfulness where I know all this but I am not vigilant and watchful.

**To sum up the 3 main principles:**

- **The first principle**

No power bigger than me will ever confront me.

- **The second principle**

I am able to face the power that confronts me and overcome it by using the resources granted to me because God said that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Therefore, if I resist him, he will surely flee; I will surely overcome; there are no two options here.

- **The third principle**

If I fail to overcome, this is due to one of two things: either I do not know; or, I know but I do not do what I know; either lack of knowledge or lack of faithfulness; either I do not know or I know but I do not obey or follow what I know.

***After discussing the three main principles, let us discuss the three main resources that help us overcome the devil:***

- The power of redemption
- The word of God
- The spiritual weapons

### **1. The Power of Redemption**

This refers to all the things that Jesus has done for our redemption because all what Jesus has done for our sake is essentially for the purpose of freeing us and releasing us from the devil himself or from his corruptive work in the human personality.

When Satan deceived Adam and caused him to fall, this resulted in slavery (Satan enslaved man) and corruption (which entered the human nature). Therefore, in redemption Jesus did the reverse of what happened in the fall. The Cross granted us weapons to overcome the devil and the ability to deal with the inner corruption, through sanctification.

***The blood of Jesus is a resource against the devil.*** The bible clearly states: '*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony*' (Revelation 12: 11).

The problem is that we are either ignorant of our resources or we see only one resource and focus on it alone and forget about the rest of the

resources. In fact, each resource has its valuable place and role in our life. The more we know our resources in their broadness, the more we are capable of overcoming all kinds of temptations and trials.

The blood of Jesus is one of the weapons of redemption.

***The Cross is another resource***, as written in Colossians 2: 15: *'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (the Cross).'*

Therefore, the blood of Jesus and the Cross grant us victory; they both terrify the powers of darkness.

The fathers of the Church used to pray holding a cross and they often crossed themselves. By the Cross they resisted the enemy and overcame him. The Cross is the sign of victory.

***Everything revealed in the bible has two aspects: the faith aspect and the mystical aspect*** because man is a spirit found in a body. We need to see all the resources granted to us and at the same time see them in a holistic way with their faith aspect and mystical aspect, the inner and the outer aspects, the spiritual and the material.

Referring to the blood of Jesus, the faith aspect is related to what the bible says about the blood of Jesus. The more I understand, pray and exercise faith, the more I receive power. I should then continue through the mystical aspect, the body and blood of Jesus which I receive in the Holy Communion. This is important because Jesus Himself established this mystery.

The same applies to the Cross. The more I understand the work of the Cross mentioned in the bible and I pray with it, the more I receive power. Also, when I hold a cross and cross myself as the fathers did, I receive power.

This is because I am not only a spirit, but a spirit found in a body. I do not only communicate with the unseen spiritual world, but I also communicate with the visible material world that surrounds me. I do not deal with the powers of darkness in the form of spirits only, but I also deal with the powers of darkness as spirits that operate through human beings, the evil people. Therefore, we cannot focus on an aspect and ignore the other. The richness of our Church lies in her ability to see a complete wholesome picture, not addressing one aspect and leaving the other, but rather seeing fully, a complete and whole picture.

Therefore, exactly as I need to understand the work of the blood of Jesus and pray with what I understand, I should also draw near the altar with faith to receive the holy mysteries and let my lips be moistened with the blood of Jesus, as John Chrysostom said, so that the devil cannot draw near my lips. Similarly, when I read the work of the Cross in the bible and pray with that, I receive power. Also, when I hold a cross in my hands as I pray and cross myself numerous as I pray, I will be opening the way for the mystical aspect. The Cross with its work mentioned in the bible speaks to my spirit and the cross which I hold in my hand speaks to my body, my hands and eyes. The more I do so, the more my faith is enriched. My faith then strengthens the seen aspect; and both of them complete my understanding and resources.

***The Resurrection of Christ is another resource in overcoming the devil.***

In the Cross was the defeat of the devil and in the resurrection the victory was proclaimed.

The Church celebrates the resurrection throughout the duration of the holy fifties (the fifty days from Easter until the Pentecost) where there is a

procession of resurrection in the church and the liturgical worship is in the joyful tune; so that these outer matters may speak to the visible aspect in us and ignite our faith. Faith matters would then increase and grow more; and then one's whole being would be filled with the power of resurrection *'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection'* (Philippians 3: 10).

The more the power of resurrection fills my inner being, the more the devil will look –even from afar –and understand that this power of resurrection (which Apostle Paul speaks about) is actually in me and would therefore reconsider and rethink before trying to come near me.

When we try to understand and perceive the resources that are granted to us to resist the enemy, we should see them in their broadness and not only focus on one of them. We should also see them in a holistic way, that is, seeing both the faith aspect and the mystical aspect, the aspect revealed in the word of God and the mystical aspect lived and practised in the church. As a result, we can live with our whole being, as spirits in a body.

Redemption is offered to our whole being. There is even redemption for the body which will reach its fullness when we put on the glorious bodies. However, there are some early manifestations of this now. The fathers of the Church were able to see things in their full picture and were able to experience a foretaste of the manifestation of redemption in their bodies. Therefore, they experienced lightness in their bodies; being carried in the spirit from place to place; their faces and fingers lit during prayers; and some had haloes appearing on their heads. This is an early manifestation of the redemption of the body while they were still in the flesh.

***The Ascension of Christ is another resource in overcoming the devil.***

When Christ ascended, He seated us with Him, *above all principality and*

*power and might and dominion* (Ephesians 1: 21). By this we can overcome the devil; we can simply proclaim that he is under our feet.

However, when I tell the devil that he is under my feet, I cannot be saying it as mere words that bear no power or as phrases empty of their true meaning and divine truth. I have to understand the meaning of having the devil under my feet. If I just say words that I do not understand, the devil will see that these are words that only my lips are uttering while my inner being comprehends nothing of its meaning and power. He will thus mock me and overcome me. Sometimes we repeat these phrases but reap no result; we do not overcome because we do not understand them; our lips just repeat them.

Yet if I want to face the devil and tell him that he is under my feet, I should understand what happened in the Ascension. I can then face the devil with the this resource of Ascension, knowing that when Christ ascended, He lifted me up with Him and seated me with Him. Because Christ is seated above all the ranks of the powers of darkness, my place in Him is above all these ranks (all principality and power and might and dominion – Ephesians 1: 21); and so, they are under me.

After Christ ascended, He sent to us the Promise of the Father on the day of Pentecost.

***The Holy Spirit is another resource to face the devil and overcome him.***

I can proclaim: *'the wind of the Lord drives you'*.

In Isaiah 59: 19, it is written: *'When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him'*; in another translation,

it reads: *'the wind of the Lord drives'* (ESV) or *the breath of the Lord drives him*.

Therefore, many of the church fathers, both in the ancient and modern history, who were gifted in casting out demons, used the 'breath'; they would breathe/blow into someone who is demon possessed and the demon would be driven away. They used 'the breath' and 'the Cross' in casting out demons. These are true resources because this is the breath of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

One of the ways of the enemy is to come in like a flood. Earlier we have said that he can come in a disguised way or he can attack directly. When he comes in like a flood, this would be his method of attacking us.

There are different spiritual resources that we can use to overcome the enemy, depending on the way he comes to us. When he comes as a flood, my weapon to overcome him would be the Spirit of God. Sometimes the enemy comes with intensive evil and overwhelming thoughts telling me; *'there is no hope; you are defeated; do not even try'*. This is an attack; he is coming in like a flood. I should then tell him: *'the breath of the Lord will drive you away'*.

Because we do not fully understand the resources available for us and we did not learn how to face the devil with them, many of the resources became phrases void of power and many of the confrontations became battling with no victory –though we should have been victorious.

To sum up, the power of redemption includes: the blood of Jesus, the Cross, Resurrection, Ascension, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **2. The Word of God**

The word of God is another resource that we can use to overcome the devil. It is written that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6: 17).

When Satan tempted Jesus (Matthew 4 & Luke 4), Jesus used the word of God to overcome him.

Jesus could have used other spiritual resources. Even though Jesus had not shed His blood on the Cross at the time of this temptation, the blood of the sacrifices was already used in the Old Testament as a shadow and symbol of the blood of Jesus. Also, in the divine economy, the blood of Jesus has been shed before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13: 8). However, in this temptation, Jesus replied Satan using the word of God. On other occasions when Jesus was casting out demons, He just said a word; He used His power which is based on the power of redemption. He is the Redeemer of humanity and so He ordered the demons to come out using a word. In Matthew 8: 16, it is written that Jesus *'cast out the spirits with a word'*. In this case, He was using the power of redemption.

The devil often comes to us with deceitful thoughts, using the word of God in a wrong way. For example, he would say, *'isn't it written: render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's? Be a balanced person. Give this to Caesar and this as well and that as well.'* He keeps suggesting to me to give this and that to Caesar until my whole life becomes Caesar's and may be only 1% remains for the Lord. This is an example of how we can be deceived by the thoughts of the devil when he uses the word of God in a wrong way, causing us to apply the verses in a way that suits our fallen and fleshly interests.

The word of God is one of the greatest resources by which we can resist the enemy and he would flee from us. Therefore, the more we read the word of God, memorise it, and use it in our prayers, the more it will become a powerful tool in our mouth against the devil.

When the devil comes with his deceitful thoughts to our mind<sup>1</sup>, the word of God protects us, giving us light and understanding –beside being in itself a direct weapon.

The more I learn and memorise the word of God, the more will I find the verses coming spontaneously to my mind, whenever the devil attacks me. As I repeat the verses, I will find that the temptation that was distressing my mind and filling me with frustration and darkness is disappearing. I will find that light comes to my mind, peace fills my soul, the wounds are healed, the confusion is dispelled and is replaced with clarity; my whole being will be filled with peace and light.

The book of Psalms is one of the most important books of Scripture that the fathers of the Church focused on and used as a tool in resisting the devil<sup>2</sup>.

The Psalms have a special work and are effective because they are prayers that the Holy Spirit gave to the Psalmist: David, Asaph, Korah and others. He gave them these prayers during difficult situations. These difficult circumstances are essentially the confrontations between man and the powers of darkness. Therefore, the Psalms are the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the tempted humanity. Thus, they are a direct tool against the devil.

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<sup>1</sup> Deceit usually attacks the mind. The mind is one of the most common battle fields of the enemy and deceit is one of the most common methods used by the devil (2 Corinthians 2: 11).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 16: 23

In other words, the Psalms are prayers sung by Psalmists who were going through difficulties and tribulations. The devil is behind these difficulties and tribulations. When the Holy Spirit gives the person a Psalm at that time, this means that He gives him a spiritual tool to use against the devil, the powers of darkness.

### **3. The Spiritual weapons**

We are all familiar with the passage in Ephesians 6:10 – 18 that lists the spiritual weapons.

Yet, this is not the only passage or the only list of spiritual weapons. There are other references in various books of the Scripture that mention specific spiritual weapons of special importance.

The general spiritual weapons mentioned in Ephesians 6 are: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and praying always in the Spirit.

These are not the only spiritual weapons available. There are also other rich and effective weapons of great value mentioned in other books of Scripture like Isaiah and other books. We will not go into the details of this here because this is just a brief overview.

#### **To sum up:**

There are 3 main principles and 3 main resources to overcome the devil.

#### **The 3 main principles are:**

1. Behind the visible temptation there is an unseen tempter. According to the rules of the Kingdom of God, God never allows an evil power greater than me to confront me.
2. Therefore, I am capable of triumphing in any confrontation; and that is why the bible tells us to resist the enemy and he will flee from us.
3. I can be defeated in one of two cases: either I do not know (lack of knowledge) or I know but I do not do (lack of faithfulness).

### **The 3 main resources are:**

#### **1. The Power of Redemption**

This includes various resources/tools. We often focus on one and forget the others. If we know these resources richly and broadly, we will overcome easily.

These tools are:

- The blood of Jesus: *'they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb'* (Revelation 12: 11).
- The Cross: *'Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it'* (Colossians 2: 15).
- The Resurrection: it is the proclamation of the victory.
- The Ascension: When Christ ascended, He lifted us up with Him and seated us in Him above all ranks; and so, the devil is under our feet.

- The Holy Spirit: the breath of the Lord drives away the enemy when he comes like a flood.

These resources of redemption have a faith aspect and a mystical aspect because the person is not only a spirit, but a spirit in a body. Therefore, we have the celebrations of the Church that highlight the mystical aspect. This includes: the feast of the cross, the holy fifties, the feast of Ascension, and the Pentecost. We also hold a cross while praying. All these things address the visible aspect in order to nourish the faith derived from the word of God; so that my faith may be built and established.

Faith is a spiritual energy. It is built up and is used up, then built up again and used up again and so on. Every time I face the enemy, I face him with this power of faith. In the battle, I lose some of this faith and I need to build it up again. When I understand what the word of God says about all these aspects of redemption, my faith is built up. When I take part in the mystical aspect of the Church services, faith is ignited. Faith continues to be built and ignited and then it is used in the battles and is then rebuilt. So not only will it be built, but also ignited which means that it is ready to be used. It is not only used and runs out, but it gets rebuilt.

## **2. The Power of the Word of God**

The book of Psalms has a special place as a powerful tool against the enemy because it was given by the Holy Spirit to people who were going through temptations and confrontations with the devil.

## **3. The Power of the Spiritual weapons**

The most important list of spiritual weapons is mentioned in Ephesians 6. Yet, there are other weapons mentioned in other books of Scripture including the book of Isaiah<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 59: 17