

HOW CAN WE RESIST THE DEVIL?

In addition to identifying Satan's methods of deceiving people, God gives us specific guidance to counteract the devil and his influence. God's Word assures us, **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you"** (James 4:7). This promise, however, is clearly directed toward those willing to **"submit to God"** (same verse) and is immediately followed with the instruction, **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"** (verse 8). How, then, do we draw near to God? His instruction continues, **"Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded"** (same verse). We must actively seek to eliminate Satan's way of thinking and behaving from our lives.

Satan, however, is so clever and powerful that no human being can successfully resist his influence without God's help. Therefore the key to resisting the devil is to sincerely and consistently draw near and remain close to God. Our first step is to allow God to wash Satan's influence from our minds. This takes place through recognising and acknowledging our sins and repenting of them. The Scriptures compare this transformation from Satan's way of thinking to coming back to life from the dead:

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

When we begin to truly repent and submit to God from the heart, we begin to take His Word seriously and to obey His instruction and commands. Then His Word, the Bible, begins cleaning up our minds, washing away our evil thoughts and motives. All who genuinely repent—who wholeheartedly surrender their lives to God and are baptised so that they may receive the Holy Spirit—are placed by Jesus Christ into His Church. Now notice Christ's concern for them and how He works with them to remove evil influences from their hearts and minds: Christ ***"loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish"*** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

God's Word is the instrument Christ uses—through the power of the Holy Spirit—to wash away Satan's influences from our thinking. But what can we do about the devil's attempts to influence us in the future? Here, too, God provides us with a defence: ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil ... Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm"*** (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Paul then lists specific elements of the spiritual armour God makes available to us. He compares the defence of God's servants against Satan's influence to a ***"belt of truth around your waist"*** and a ***"breastplate of righteousness"*** (verse 14).

He describes their combat shoes as **"whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace"** (verse 15). Their shield is their faith in God and His Son, Jesus Christ, **"with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one"** (verse 16). Their resolve is protected by **"the helmet of salvation"** (verse 17)—the assurance that in steadfastly serving and pleasing God they will receive eternal life. The one offensive weapon they can use to cut to ribbons satan's attitudes and philosophies is the **"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (same verse). Indeed, all the elements of the armor listed derive from Scripture, so it is vital that we be studying and meditating on the Bible regularly.

Finally, Paul says, **"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints"** (verse 18). Indeed, regular prayer is essential to maintaining our nearness to God. These are the essential keys for warding off satan's efforts to regain control over **"the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error"** (2 Peter 2:18).

The more our character becomes like God's perfect nature, the less satan will feel comfortable in our presence, and the more he will be inclined to flee from us.