

The Spiritual Battle:

A Christian Understanding of the World, the Flesh and the Devil

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Brief description of the talk

- Why is it important to know that these are enemies of our walk in the Spirit?
- This season of Lent is a timely opportunity to think on how Jesus dealt with these enemies.
- Jesus responded to the world, flesh and devil through obediently applying the scriptures. Tonight we too will rely on the power of the Word to bring home to us all that the Holy Spirit wants to teach us.
- **Main Points:**
 1. Definition of the three terms.
 2. Examples of how they operate in our lives.
 3. Strategies for obtaining the Lord's victory in these areas.

Tonight I want to place a **frame** around the talk or perhaps use a **lens**... I want us to think of these three enemies of our souls against the backdrop of our **holy, almighty Father**... the Father that Jesus came to reveal to us. We can't really think about these things correctly without first affirming the presence and love of the Father in our midst.

1 John 4: 7-13 God is love

John 16:13-15

John 16: 26-33

God is so much broader... so infinitely good and **unchallenged** by evil. He is so **secure** within Himself that He allows men and angels to prefer Him as opposed to being forced to love Him...which would not be love at all.

The Church, while acknowledging the deadly consequences of sin, holds out the hope for our souls: "**O happy fault of Adam, that has given us such a Redeemer.**"

The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes St. Catherine of Sienna: "to those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them," "everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind."

James 1:16-18

In his book, *Life in the Lordship of Christ*, Fr. Cantalamessa quotes the third-century church father Tertullian as he speaks about the incarnation: "God acted like a king who possessed a precious gem set in a gold ring, which one day fell into a sewer. The king put on slaves clothes and plunged into the foul sewage, got hold of his ring, washed it in water and put it on his finger so that it could shine there again. The gem, the author explains, is man's soul

and the ring is his body, both fallen into the sewage of sin; Jesus is the king who dressed like a slave, descended into the world of sin and found man, washed him in the water of Baptism and led him back to the Father.

The World

1. **The World** The world that Jesus referred to was not the material planet which was created so good; the seas, mountains, trees, rivers and animals... no, Jesus is talking about the system of pervasive sin and darkness...the corporate response of society to prefer darkness over light.

John 17: 6 I have revealed your name to those whom you took from the world to give me. Obviously the Lord did not physically remove the disciples from their surroundings, but he "took" them out of the system of distrust, spite and hatred of the Trinity.

John 17... the priestly prayer of Jesus over and over lifts the believer up to the **Father**. Jesus prays that the presence of the Father... the life of the Trinity is the new world... the new system of relating.

John 15:18, John 15:22, John 12:31

The world gets its power, it is animated by sin. The image of the tranquil pond being disturbed by the pebble... the ripples spread throughout the entire body of water.

1 John 2:15, Ephesians 2

The Flesh

2. **The Flesh**
As with the world, the flesh that Jesus spoke about was not the physical bodies that He has given us. Jesus is speaking of the **force of sin and arrogance that animates our bodies, our actions and our words**... the desire that drives us to drink in all that life has to offer without a drop of Christ. Our age believes in a "God," but mention Christ, the holy Son of the Virgin Mary, and we'll often see the friction... the absolute refusal to accept that we are made right with God on His terms alone, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus. This drive toward independence and self exaltation is in us all and we as believers must bring this to the cross for emptying out.

Galatians 5:13-26

St. Paul labored to bring the church at Galatia to a place where they did not slide back into trying to please God without faith and grace. The struggle to overcome the behaviors he outlined and the attempt to keep the law are intricately connected.

Some examples of "the flesh" as it opposes the life in the Spirit of God.

At work: We may long for position, power, the need to be right and more powerful than our coworkers. We may long for the admiration of others at the expense of others.

At home: James' letter to the early church warns us that God's justice is never served by human anger.

In church: Often the need to be right... to have our will prevail.

Unforgiveness: We may believe we have the right to hold unforgiveness toward another.

We may have unforgiveness toward ourselves. (Note: sometimes self-unforgiveness can lead to self-hatred, which opens the door to demonic activity)

- **Some helps in dealing with the power of the flesh as it wars against the Spirit:**
- Our souls are brought into the light of God through the sacraments. The sacrament of reconciliation can lift off the false self and reveal the self that the Lord calls up into His light. Honest confession of sins checks the desire of the flesh as it rises up to control our life. We never crucify the real integrated self-it's the warped sinful nature that we declare dead.
- **Holy Eucharist.** Our sharing in this mystery brings us directly into the resurrected presence of Christ... "**what return can I make to the Lord... I will take up the cup of salvation**" Here is where we are deeply indwelt by His presence. St. Paul speaks of the kenosis-the emptying out of the man Jesus. Here is where He pours into us the very essence of that suffering...as we have said here at MOG...the great exchange.
- Meaningful dialogue with another believer who will pray for you as you confront the drives that may empower the flesh life. Prayer for healing has to be done with complete honesty and transparency. We must acknowledge our fleshy responses-not endless introspection, but not glossing over trouble spots either.
- **1 John:14**

The Devil

3. **The Devil**

- Prayer: Lord, your holy blood frees us from all evil. Even now surround us with your presence and cause us think clearly about these things.
- Some important points about who the devil is:
- The Catholic Catechism teaches us that evil is a mystery. The church teaches that the devil or Satan was once a good angel created by Almighty God. Satan fell from fellowship with God through his own choice.
- His power is strong and deceitful but finite and limited. It will come to an end.
- The evil one is not the opposite of Christ Jesus. The incarnate Son of God is the Alpha and Omega. Remember, Satan is an angel.
- One of the prayers of the Church is "Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus." As we believe this will once and for all usher in the fullness of the kingdom as the **accuser** of the brothers is cast out (**Revelation**). The suffering and death of Jesus has already won the eschatological victory...we wait in hope for His coming!

One area that Satan uses to keep us from advancing in life in the Spirit is to try to shame us into isolation and fear.

Wisdom 2:22 God did not create death...

A spiritual director once told me, "There are two errors we can make when considering the evil one; one is to attribute every problem and difficulty to his doing, and the other is to neglectfully ignore his existence and activity in the world."

1 John 3:8 Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus will destroy the evil one's influence in our souls.

Some thoughts on dealing with the evil one:

- The tempter will use any tactic he can to promote sin and influence our drives. Jesus always dealt authoritatively with evil spirits.
- He did not dialogue. Luke's gospel speaks of Jesus' response to the deceptive tactics of the Pharisees (Luke 13:31-Herod the fox).
- Even in his temptation in the desert He was forthright and always directed the focus back to the Father.
- Essentially, He stayed focused on **His Father** and did not allow Himself to be bullied.

Some Scriptural truths-remember how Jesus opposed the devil as he recited the word of God:

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| • <u>James 1:13-14</u> | God does not tempt us. |
| • <u>Hebrews 4:14</u> | God is with us. |
| • <u>2 Timothy 4:18</u> | God is more powerful than evil. |
| • <u>1 Timothy 4:9-10</u> | Christ is worthy of our trust. |
| • <u>2 Thess 3:4</u> | The Lord is faithful. |

**St. Michael Archangel prayer, The Rosary, Fasting
Sacramentals; holy water, blessed oil, medals, crucifixes, icons.**

Questions for Scripture Study and Small Group Discussion

1. Jesus said, "**Now the prince of this world has been overthrown**" What is Jesus saying with regard to evil? How do these words of Jesus relate to the spiritual battle? See **John 12:31**
2. Are there areas in my life where I wish I had more **authority to live a holy life**? Often we struggle with specific sin patterns, habits and failures and can despair when we feel powerless to change. Lent is a time of receiving His cleansing grace. Read **Psalms 51**
3. We can only truly forgive others to the degree that we ourselves have experienced the forgiveness of Jesus. Unforgiveness obstructs the flow of the life of God in us. Do I have any **unresolved bitterness, shame or unforgiveness**? Jesus is fully committed to setting you free from anything holding you back from the fullness of life.
4. Fear is so often a tool of the evil one. We respond in ways that exalt the "flesh life" when we are afraid. Our Father in heaven wants us to live in trust. Jesus told the centurion, "**fear is useless, what is needed is trust.**" As we pray about the

spiritual battle we face in following the Lord, what specific fears stand in our way?
Meditate on [Psalm 18](#)