



"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

Introduction

Satan is in continuous war with us. He uses all ways and means in order to trap us. One of Satan's titles is "the deceiver", "the liar and father of all liars" and St. Paul said *"we are not ignorant of his devices"* (2 Corinthians 2:11). In the previous articles, the nature of the spiritual war with Satan, his allies, strategies and weapons as well as our types of weapons (both offensive and defensive) have been discussed. This article will illustrate the sequential steps that Satan takes in the process of making us fall in his hand starting from deception and ending up in bondage.

1. *It is just an idea.* Satan starts small, soft and easy usually playing on the weakest cord. "It is just a suggestion, an idea." He did that with Eve instilling in her mind the idea that he wants their interest more than God. So, he filled her mind with the idea that they will become knowledgeable and on a par with God. Jesus Christ Himself was not exempted from Satan's deceitful ideas. The three suggestions sounded feasible, glorious and satisfying. However, the

Lord knowing the devil's deceitful nature and being well versed in the Word, answered him well thus establishing a very important teaching which is to test all ideas against the truth of God. All the church fathers advise to distract negative sinful thoughts and renounce them. St. Anthony's advice is to have a verse at hand for every idea against which to weigh and test its validity.

2. Why not consider this idea? Satan who can convince people that he does not exist, will not push his ideas into execution right away but will allow space and time for considering his ideas, weighing them out and calculating the pros and cons. He will gradually try to bring in some merits into his ideas. By doing so, eventually the idea will become more and more appealing by virtue of having dwelt on it for a long time and created some merits for it. Thus, you will end up accepting what you have been originally rejecting. The best advice here is not to negotiate with Satan in the same manner you would not negotiate with a robber about to break into your house. The best example of fleeing from evil is Joseph who did not pause to accept the idea

Potiphar's wife offered him. He ran away for his purity.

3. Consideration reflected in attitude. Once the idea is considered positively, supportive feelings will emerge. Once emotions are attached to thoughts, it will be difficult without the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome ideas. Judas Iscariot is a good example. Satan tapped on his weak point of the love of money and suggested to him through the Jews and their high priests to give Christ over to them at the cost of thirty pieces of silver. He probably considered the idea for a while perhaps fooling himself into the fact that the Master will get out of it. Convincing himself falsely of the feasibility of his act, his emotions finally stamped the idea with the seal of consent and he finally offered the priceless at a minimum price. After the enticement was over and having come to his senses, he realized the atrocity of his act. Satan, when selling the idea to Judas, did not sell hope or any positive outcome. Standing alone and in despair, Judas ended his life in the worst manner.

4. Action will follow. The growing intensity of thoughts and feelings will inevitably find vent by turning into action. This stage is manifest in King David's sin of adultery. Satan playing on the cord of the authority King David had, he provided the opportunity and the idea. David considered it, attached emotions to it, his attitude expressed them and after having committed adultery with the woman, he fell into a more grievous action murdering her husband.

5. Action turns into habit. Any action, once enjoyed, is bound to be repeated. Repetition creates habits. All bad, sinful habits such as drugs, smoking, gambling and sexual immorality started with one time and eventually turned into endless times.

6. Habit ends in bondage. If actions remain covered, in the dark and unshared with a spiritual father or someone trust worthy, they will eventually lead to bondage. A bondage is terrible slavery to Satan and will need time and the work and support of the Holy Spirit in order to have it removed. "*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and*

enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14,15).

It is usually easier to attack sin and destroy it at an earlier step than to wait to the sixth step to launch the war. However, there is still hope in God's mercy even at the latest stage of bondage. *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4). In order to be victorious we need to fight back in every step at any time.

How to Fight Thoughts

- *Exposing thoughts*. Bringing ideas to the light of Christ will weaken Satan's control over them. Unrevealed thoughts will use the darkness they are in as a photocopier generating as many copies as desired by Satan. Freedom and liberation reside in uncovering thoughts.
- *Guarding the gates*. Do not allow any idea to pass through the gates of your body (the senses) without censorship. This will ensure purity and holiness.

- Setting up traps. Trap Satan and his deceitful ways by memorizing the word of God. "It is written" were the Lord's trap to Satan on the Mountain of Temptation, David, after having tasted the sour, bitter taste of sin, he decided to keep the word of God in his heart in order not to sin "Your word I have hidden in my heart,? that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:11) Also, reading the biography of the saints fills the mind and heart with the sweet aroma of their fights and victories.
- Harboring a spirit of discernment and wisdom. "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). St. Anthony the Great believes that any virtue practiced without discernment can turn into a vice. St. James demands that "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).
- Seeking spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity does not dawn on us between day and night. It comes gradually and after diligent, incessant dwelling on the Word of God, practicing the

church rules and regulations, and sharing with one another the good news of the gospel. St. Paul realized that and spoke about giving the Corinthians milk first before solid food. *"I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal"* (1 Corinthians 3:2-3).

- *Practicing self control*. Self control is a tool and a product, a means and an end of spiritual growth and maturity. When we practice self control, in the form of fasting and curbing thoughts and desires, we grow spiritually and when we grow spiritually self control becomes easier.

How to Get out of Bondage

Though bondage is a late stage in sin, yet it is never too late to get out of it. Struggling to get out of bondage is precious in the sight of God and receives its reward if it is a genuinely sought out victory.

There is a big difference between staying in bondage and getting out of it. The former, prompted by Satan, leads to despair and eventual spiritual death. The latter leads to hope, ushers in a fresh beginning, and prepares for a life with Christ. To break bondage,

support is needed. This support comes from two sources:

- Visible source from family, church and dedicated consecrated servants.
- Invisible source from God Himself in prayer, reading His word and receiving Him in the church sacraments.

Conclusion

Satan repeats himself in tempting us. All his power lies in deception. He can go as far as disguising himself in the form of an angel of light. However, if Satan ever loses this power, he will turn into nothing. He uses extremely subtle methods without openly acknowledging any of his work. He may plan for years to make someone fall into one particular sin. He comes in with positive, as well as negative, ideas of low self esteem, hopelessness and depression. In his craftiness, he uses feasible steps in selling his goods. He starts with an idea. Allowing time for consideration, he paves the ground for positive aspects until the idea is supported with positive emotions. Feelings are powerful and in their intensity they seek action. Acts are bound to be repeated turning into habits and ending up in bondage. However, thanks to God and His covering blood, it has never been too late nor impossible for

victims to return back and be delivered from this bondage, once they decide to do so.

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