

**“...Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices”  
(2Cor.2: 11)**

**+ General Introduction +**

**D) Water & Wind:**

In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul said that he is not ignorant of Satan’s devices. Our Lord Jesus Christ summarized Satan’s wickedness when He said, ‘He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it’ (Jn.8: 44). In order for Satan to do what he does best -to lie, he first challenges the truth and casts doubts in the person’s mind. The majority of Satan’s words, which are recorded in Holy Scriptures, are either questions or challenges to the word of God.

+ In the Holy Book of Genesis:

**God said:** “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen.2: 16,17).

**Satan said:** “Has God indeed said, ‘you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’  
“You will not surely die” (Gen.3: 1-3).

\* Notice how Satan is lying in his question; God did not say not to eat of *every* tree.

+ In the Holy Book of Job:

**God said** that Job was “a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1: 8).

**Satan said:** “Does Job fear God for nothing?”(Job1: 9).

+ In the Holy Gospel of Matthew/Luke:

**God the Father said:** “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt.3: 17).

**Satan said:** “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matt.4: 3). “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down” (Matt.4: 6).

+ In the Gospel of St. Matthew/Luke:

Satan tried to convince our Lord Jesus Christ to jump from the pinnacle of the temple by quoting (Ps.91: 11,12). But when you read the whole Psalm you will realize that God ‘shall give His angels charge concerning you, and in their hands they shall bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone’ if your enemies through you down not when you, *willingly*, jump down.

Satan’s primary goal is to discredit the words of God (Holy Scriptures) leaving the person vulnerable to accept his lies. Those who fall in this deception are called unbelievers for they did not believe the words of God. Satan uses a different approach with the person who believes in the authority of Holy Scriptures; he does not question the truth in them but misinterprets it. Those who fall in this second deception are called heretics for they teach false teachings even though they may believe in the authority of the word of God. St. Peter said that some of St. Paul’s writings are hard to understand and that ‘those who are untaught and unstable twist (them) to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2Pet. 3: 15). Moreover, St. Paul excommunicated those who incorrectly interpret the Holy Gospel (Gal.1: 6-9).

## **II) Faith:**

It is obvious that Satan has a major problem with the words of God. **But why?** Here are a few reasons:

1) The word of God is food for our spirits:

It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Deut.8: 3-Matt.4: 4). King David said, 'How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth' (Ps.119: 103). Jeremiah also said, 'Your words were found, and I ate them' (Jer.15: 16). Amos prophesied about a famine, 'not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water. But of hearing the words of the Lord' (Amos 8: 11). This spiritual famine reminds us with the severe famine that arose in the land where the prodigal son was living (Lk.15: 14,15).

2) The word of God is a weapon against the devil:

St. Paul was talking to the Ephesians about the diabolic wars and the armor of God, he said, '...take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God' (Eph.6: 17). He also said that the word of God is 'living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword' (Heb.4: 12). Therefore, we read in the Book of Revelation that our Lord Jesus Christ said about the sinners of Pergamos that He will fight against them with the sword of His mouth (Rev.2: 16).

3) The word of God supports our weak faith:

King David cries to the Lord saying, 'My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word' (Ps.119: 28), 'Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction' (Ps.119: 49,50), and 'You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word' (Ps.119: 114). Also, St. Peter told our Lord, 'At Your word I will let down the net' (Lk.5: 5).

4) The word of God heals, purifies, and cleans us:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, 'You are already clean because of the word, which I have spoken to you' (Jn.15: 3). The centurion said to our Lord, 'Only speak a word, and my servant will be healed' (Matt.8: 8).

5) The word of God guides us:

King David said, 'Your word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Ps.119: 105), and 'The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes' (Ps.19: 8). The Lord said, 'My son, if you receive My words...Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God' (Prov.2: 1-5).

6) The word of God gives us eternal life:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life' (Jn.6: 63), and, 'Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death' (Jn.8: 51). St. Peter said to our Lord, 'To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (Jn.6: 68).

7) The word of God will judge Satan and whoever believes his lies:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day' (Jn.12: 48).

### **III) The Church Fathers & Holy Scriptures:**

“Some say that not all the Psalms are by David, but that some are by others. About this I make no very strong affirmation. What difference does it make to me whether all of them or some of them are David’s, when it is clear in any case that all are written under the operation of the Divine Spirit?” (Theodoret of Cyr, 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century)

“If, however, we are not able to find explanation for all those passages of Scripture which are investigated, we ought not on that account seek for another God besides Him who exists. This would indeed be the greatest impiety. Things of that kind we must leave to God, the One who made us, knowing full well that the Scriptures are certainly perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and by His Spirit.” (St. Irenaeus, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century)

“I have learned to hold those books of the Scriptures that are now called canonical in such reverence and honor that I do most firmly believe that none of their authors has erred in anything that he has written therein. If I find anything in those writings which seems contrary to the truth, I presume that either the codex (manuscript) is inaccurate, or the translator has not followed what was said, or I have not properly understood it.” (St. Augustine of Hippo, 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century)

#### **+ Comment:**

At the time when St. Augustine said these words, the canonization of the Holy Scriptures was fairly recent and the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, was examining every copy and every source of Scriptures making sure that the manuscripts were accurate. St. Augustine’s words demonstrate to us that the Church fathers did not accept the canonized books blindly but rather explored and examined the original manuscripts on regular basis. The reliability of the Bible manuscripts will be discussed in lecture I.

### **IV) The Old Testament Canon:**

Most of the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, the language of Israel. Many Jews were living outside Israel and the Hebrew Language has ceased to be a commonly spoken language among those Jews. It was used in the synagogues, but the people, for the most part, did not speak it at home.

So a couple of centuries before Christ, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek. Seventy translators in the city of Alexandria in Egypt made this translation, so this Greek translation is called the Septuagint (from the Greek word for ‘seventy’). The reliability of the translation was promoted by the tradition that all seventy came up individually with identical translations.

The language familiar to most of those hearing or reading the Scriptures in the early Church would have been Greek, so it is this Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint that is the official Old Testament of the Orthodox Church. Because nearly all currently available English Old Testaments (including the New King James Version) are not translated from the Septuagint texts, but from the Hebrew texts, it’s hard to get a Septuagint Old Testament.

### + Why the Septuagint?

- 1) Particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets, the prophecies that are made regarding the coming of the Savior, the Messiah, are far more literal, far more precise, far more intense in the Septuagint text than they are in the Hebrew texts of the rabbis.
- 2) The Septuagint was actually based on an older set of manuscripts in Hebrew that are not available in more.
- 3) Whenever the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, the version that is quoted almost without exception is the Septuagint version.
- 4) The early Church Father's quotations of the Old Testament are always from the Septuagint.
- 5) The other aspect of the Old Testament that is part of what the Orthodox Church accepts as canonical Scripture is what is called the 'Deutro-Canonical'. (Canonical means legitimate according to the canon, the rule of faith.) This consists of Books that are found only in the Septuagint version and not in the Hebrew texts. Such books as Tobit, Judah, more chapters to the Book of Esther, more chapters to the prophecy of Daniel, the Book of Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom of Solomon, the Book of Sirach, the Prophecy of Baruch, the Prayer of Manasseh. Protestant translations, which include these Books, refer to them as the 'Apocrypha'. The root word 'apocrypha' means 'that which is hidden'. We don't use that word in the Orthodox Church to refer to the Books that belong to the longer canon. Protestants use the term 'Apocrypha' to imply that those Books are not really part of the Old Testament, but are extra, less than fully Scriptural books. But in the Orthodox Church these Books are understood to be fully part of the Old Testament. (1)

### V) The New Testament Canon:

The first complete listing of New Testament books as we have them today did not appear until over 300 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. St. Athanasius gave the first complete listing in his Paschal letter in 367 A.D. Imagine it! If the writing of the New Testament had been begun at the same time as the U.S. Constitution, we wouldn't see a final product until the year 2076!

The four Gospels were written from thirty to sixty years after Christ's death and resurrection. In the interim, the Church relied on oral tradition as well as scattered pre-gospel documents (such as those quoted in 1 Tim. 3: 16 and 2 Tim. 11-13) and written tradition. Most Churches only had parts of what was to become the New Testament. As the eyewitnesses of Christ's life and teachings began to die, the Apostles wrote as they were guided by the Holy Spirit, in order to preserve and solidify the scattered written and oral tradition. Because the Apostles expected Christ to return soon, it seems they did not have in mind that these gospel accounts and apostolic letters would in time be collected into a new Bible.

During this period of the canon's evolution, as previously noted, most Churches had only a few, if any, of the apostolic writings available to them. The books of the Bible had to be painstakingly copied by hand, at great expense of time and effort. Also, because

most people were illiterate, they could only be read by a privileged few. The exposure of most Christians to the Scriptures was confined to what they heard in the Churches. The persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire and the existence of many documents of non-apostolic origin further complicated the matter. (2)

What criteria were used in drawing up the canon? The basic principle appears to have been that of *recognition* rather than the *imposition* of authority. In other words, the works in question were recognized as already possessing authority, rather than having an arbitrary authority imposed upon them. The Church does not *create* the canon; it *acknowledges, conserves, and receives* canonical Scripture on the basis of the authority that is already inherent to it (St. Irenaeus). However, although the precise details of how the selection was made remain unclear, it is certain that the canon was closed within the western church by the beginning of the fifth century (3)

#### **VI) The Second Winter Youth Convention:**

This year's convention is about the Words of God (Holy Scriptures). We will, by the grace of God, answer the following questions:

- + **How were Scriptures written?**
- + **What is the meaning of inspiration?**
- + **How reliable are these Books?**
- + **Are there any contradictions among them?**
- + **Is there any contradiction between them and science?**
- + **What is the correct way to interpret Scriptures?**
- + **How to read and benefit from Scriptures?**
- + **Is there really a fifth Gospel and is it canonical?**

The topic of this convention was inspired by the words of David:

**“The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall preserve them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.” (Ps.12: 6,7)**

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1) Adapted from “*What we believe*” by Fr. David Anderson, 1997, Concillar Press.

2) Adapted from “*Which came first: The Church or the New Testament?*” by A. James Bernstein, 1994, Concillar Press.

3) Adapted from “*Christian Theology*” by Alister E. McGrath, 1997, Blackwell publishers.