

Topics in Practical Theology – Lesson 2 – Spiritual Warfare

Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

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19 August 2007

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the battle in the Christian life.
2. What are some of your particular battles now?

The Apostle Paul described Christians as soldiers (2 Tim 2:3) implying that we are at war. Every Christian is in the middle of a battle whether they know it or not. Some are fully aware of the battle that rages – fully engaged. Others, due to callousness or insensitivity are oblivious to the battle.

¹⁸This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, ¹⁹keeping faith and a good conscience... 1 Tim 1:18-19a

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. 2 Tim 4:7

¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 2 Cor 10:3

But what is the nature of this battle? Is it war at the cosmic level or is it much closer to home? The Scriptures are clear that there are events happening on a spiritual plane that we are not aware of.

¹²And he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. ¹³But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Dan 10:12-13

While there are global (cosmic really) events happening in this war, the battle that is brought to believers is in the form of a three-prong attack: the devil, the world, and the flesh.

The devil

Satan is a created being and therefore does not possess any of God's incommunicable attributes (omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty, etc.). Satan is a murderer, a liar, the father of lies (John 8:44), the tempter of believers (Matt 4:1-11; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5) working to defeat them (1 Thess 2:18; Eph 6:11-12; Matt 13:38-39; Rev 2:10), and the accuser (Rev 12:10) and adversary of the brethren (1 Pet 5:8). Satan may masquerade as an angel of light to deceive people (2 Cor 11:14). Satan uses the world system to propagate his lies and to entice people to sin.

Satan's cohorts are demons which are evil or fallen angels who followed Satan in his revolt against God (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:1-14) and who are ruled by Satan (Matt 12:24; 25:41; 12:7). Eventually all demons including Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Matt 25:41). Demons can cause disease (Luke 13:11) with God's permission (Job 1:12; 2:6; cf. 2 Cor 12:7-10), influence the mind of unbelievers and believers (2 Cor 4:4; 11:3; Acts 5:3), deceive people (1 Thess 3:5) and nations (Rev 16:14), and possess unbelievers (Matt 4:24).

Paul says that he knew the tactics of the enemy and that Satan was unable to take advantage of him.

¹¹so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 2 Cor 2:11

So, what are Satan's schemes?

The world

Satan's worldwide system (2 Cor 4:4; John 16:11; 1 John 2:15-17) of deception and wickedness that leaves God out and is opposed to Him. The wisdom of this world is demonic (James 3:15). Satan's aim is to make the values of this godless system seem attractive, appealing to all that is in the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life to entice us to sin.

We are all constantly bombarded by non-biblical worldview ideas from television, film, music, newspapers, magazines, books, advertisements and secular academia. Because of our intrinsic sinfulness, these ideas seductively appeal to our sinful nature and we often incorporate them into our personal worldview, often without even knowing it. Paul said, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will"* (12:2).

Romans 12:1 says, *"...Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold..."* (J.B. Phillips) Most people go through life not recognizing that their personal worldview has been deeply affected by the world. The secular humanistic view of the world affects our thinking more than we realize. We then are taken *"captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ"* (Col. 2: 8). Steven C. Riser - What's the Big Deal About Worldview?

The flesh

The sinful nature, inherited from Adam, that results in the complete corruption and depravity of our will, conscience, and intellect. At salvation we are born again (John 3:3-8), the power of the sinful nature over us is broken (Rom 6:15-23), and a new nature is imparted (2 Peter 1:4). The sinful nature is not eradicated at salvation. The flesh and the new nature are now opposed to one another and are at war. We battle the flesh so that we are not carried away by our own lust (James 1:14) as we are bombarded with and tempted by the lies of Satan that he presents in his world system.

The battle is for our mind.

⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. ... ⁸See to it that no one takes you **captive** through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. Col 2:4, 8

³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought **captive** to the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor 10:3-5

¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. James 1:13-15

²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. Col 3:2

Our thoughts must be brought into submission to the “word of truth.”

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. John 17:17

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Rom 12:2

God commands us to stand firm against the schemes of the devil

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH**, and **HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**, ¹⁵and **having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**; ¹⁶in addition to all, **taking up the shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷And **take THE HELMET OF SALVATION**, and **the sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God. ¹⁸With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, Eph 6:10-18

Whether confronting Satan’s efforts to distrust God, forsaking obedience, producing doctrinal confusion and falsehood, hindering service to God, bring division, serving God in the flesh, living hypocritically, being worldly, or in any other way reject biblical obedience, this armor is our defense. MacArthur Study Bible page 1815

Gird loins with truth – the idea of tucking away everything that can hinder us in the battle. (Heb 12:1)

Breastplate of righteousness – the righteousness that comes from a deep and abiding walk with Christ. (Heb 5:14)

Preparations of the gospel of peace – We have peace with God and He is on our side in the battle. (Rom 5:1)

Shield of faith – a large shield that protects the whole body, Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4)

Helmet of salvation – the assurance of our salvation (see 1 Thess 5:8 – the hope of salvation) which the believer can begin to doubt as he is attacked by Satan.

Sword of the Spirit – to defend against attack and destroy the enemies schemes.

The Scriptures promise that if we resist the devil he will flee from us.

⁷Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7

The believer is in a war. We are being attacked by the devil, the world system, and the flesh. Yet, God has given us everything we need to be victorious in the battle: the Word (2 Tim 3:16-17; Psa 119:9-16; Eph 5:26; John 15:7; 17:17), the intercession of Christ (1 John 2:1; Heb 7:25; John 17), and the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; Rom 8:9; 1 John 2:20; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Acts 1:8; Eph 5:18; Gal 6:16).