

Spiritual Warfare

“We have had occasion several times in our study of this letter to marvel at the breadth of Paul’s horizons. He began by unfolding God’s purpose, conceived in a past eternity before the foundation of the world, to create a single new human race through the death and resurrection of Christ and ultimately to unite the whole church and the whole creation under Christ’s headship. He has emphasized that a distinctive shape has been given to this divine plan by the inclusion in God’s new society, on an entirely equal footing, of Jews and Gentiles. The old days of division and discrimination have gone. A brand-new oneness has emerged, in which through union with Christ, Jews and Gentiles are equal members of the same body and equal sharers in the same promise. So now the one Father has one family, the one Messiah-Savior one people, and the one Spirit one body. These sure facts of what God has done through Christ and by the Spirit form the basis on which Paul went on to issue his eloquent appeal. His readers must live a life that is ‘worthy’ of their calling and ‘fitting’ to their status as God’s new and reconciled society. They must demonstrate their unity in the Christian fellowship, while at the same time rejoicing in the diversity of their gifts and of their ministries. They must put away all the uncleanness of their pre-conversion behavior and live a life of ‘true righteousness and holiness’. And they must learn to submit to one another in every kind of domestic relationship and so promote harmony in their homes. Unity, diversity, purity and harmony—these the apostle has stressed as major characteristics of the new life and the new society in Christ. It has seemed a beautiful ideal, an obviously desirable goal, and not so difficult to attain.

But now Paul brings us down to earth, and to realities harsher than dreams. He reminds us of the opposition. Beneath surface appearances an unseen spiritual battle is raging. He introduces us to the devil (already mentioned in 2:2 and 4:27) and to certain ‘principalities and powers’ at his command. He supplies us with no biography of the devil, and no account of the origin of the forces of darkness. He assumes their existence as common ground between himself and his readers. In any case, his purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to warn us of their hostility and teach us how to overcome them. Is God’s plan to create a new society? Then they will do their utmost to destroy it. Has God through Jesus Christ broken down the walls dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil through his emissaries will strive to rebuild them. Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them the seeds of discord and sin. It is with these powers that we are told to wage war, or—to be more precise—to ‘wrestle’ (verse 12, AV). This metaphor is not necessarily incompatible with that of the armed soldier which Paul goes on to develop, as if he ‘changed the scenery from that of the battlefield to that of the gymnasium’. He is simply wanting to emphasize the reality of our engagement with the powers of evil, and the grim necessity of hand-to-hand combat.”¹

Be strong in the Lord by putting your armor on!

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, pgs. 260-262

firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. – Ephesians 6:10-20

“We all wish we could spend our lives in undisturbed tranquility, among our loved-ones at home and in the fellowship of God’s people. But the way of the escapist has been effectively blocked. Christians have to face the prospect of conflict with God’s enemy and theirs. We need to accept the implications of this concluding passage of Ephesians. ‘It is a stirring call to battle...Do you not hear the bugle, and the trumpet? We are being roused, we are being stimulated, we are being set upon our feet; we are told to be men. The whole tone is martial, it is strong.’ Moreover, there will be no cessation of hostilities, not even a temporary truce or cease-fire, until the end of life or of history when the peace of heaven is attained.”²

Spiritual Warfare Defined

- Spiritual Warfare is a war against demonic forces in heavenly places that hinder the spread of the gospel and the progress of the church (collectively, individually, or a member within). We wage this war in the strength and with the weapons our Father in Heaven has graciously supplied.
- Spiritual Warfare is the unrelenting activity of Satan where he opposes God, His purposes and His people.

Two Exhortations for Spiritual Warfare

a) *Be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might (v. 10).*

- Our strength is in the Lord! We are not sufficient! We cannot fight this battle in our own strength! How foolish!
- Our aim is not to get fixated on Satan; it is to fix our eyes on Jesus!

b) *Take up the whole armor of God (v. 13)*

- We have a responsibility in this war! We are not to be passive! We don’t always and rarely need deliverance from demons; we need long obedience in the right direction!
- We need the full armor of God, like a soldier, because Satan looks for gaps and seek to exploit them!

The Nature and Enemy in Spiritual Warfare

- Spiritual Warfare is fought in the “heavenly places” – just as every spiritual blessing is found in the heavenly places, so too does spiritual warfare take place in the heavenly places. Why?

² Ibid

“Wherever grace brings advance and victory, attacks will come.” – Sinclair Ferguson

- Most (Not All!) Spiritual Warfare takes place in the “ordinary”
 - Are we in marital conflict? Satan is happy.
 - Are we embittered towards someone? Satan is pleased.
 - Are we unwilling to forgive? Satan is satisfied.
 - Are we casual towards spending time in God’s Word? Satan smiles.
 - Are we unwilling to spend time in prayer? Satan is supportive.
 - Are we devouring someone or our local church through our words, our actions, or our internal dissension? Satan finds delight.
 - Are we walking in some form of darkness? Satan applauds.
 - Are we lethargic Christians playing around with sin? Satan will work with that.
 - Are we half-hearted toward the church? Satan will encourage that.

“It is {often} in the ordinary progress of sanctification that the Devil seeks to defeat us. “One member of a family can spoil an occasion for the whole family by demanding his or her own way, insisting on being first, or refusing to enjoy a common activity. Satan knows that if he can stir up selfishness; jealousy, or pride in just one person he can paralyze, and perhaps even destroy, a whole fellowship.” - Sinclair Ferguson

- Satan is an opportunist.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some to devour." -1 Peter 5:8

- He is a schemer and a deceiver - He will whisper 100 truths to get us to listen to the 101st thing he will say, which will be a lie.
- He masquerades as an angel of light.
- His aim is destruction, but He will often settle for weakness and ineffectiveness in the Kingdom of God
- He is subtle, crafty, sneaky; he will turn on you in an instant; encouraging you to go one way, and when you do, and the sting of shame and condemnation follows, he’s right there to drown you in condemnation.
- He is a devourer.
- He is strategically organized – rulers, authorities, cosmic powers

“I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his “fiery darts”. – Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us to compromise and deceive us into error.” – John Stott

Our Power for Spiritual Warfare

- Belt of Truth – truth of doctrine, truth of heart
- Breastplate of Righteousness- covered the vital organs; righteousness that Christ provides that shields us from Satan’s accusations, and the integrity of character that rise up from a justified life.
- The Gospel of Peace - secure grounding in the gospel who is a help to and not a hindrance to the Gospel. Readiness, firmness and steadfastness
- The Shield of Faith – door like shield that could withstand fiery darts. Satan loves to attack our assurance. We raise our shield; we trust Christ.
- The Helmet of Salvation – As a helmet protected a soldier’s head the imagery here is of our mind, and the truth of the gospel and our salvation being protected. Remind yourself of what you have!
- The Sword of the Spirit – the only offensive weapon; the Word of God.
- Prayer – Put it all on and leave nothing to chance!

Conclusion

- We pray, for ourselves, one another
- We keep alert
- God supplies the armor but we take it up...we use everything God has given us.
- We fix our eyes on Jesus, not on Satan, not on warfare!