

SPIRITUAL WARFARE¹ AN INTRODUCTION

Texts

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong [in the Lord and in the strength of his might]. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against [the schemes of the devil]. ¹² For 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. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in [the evil day,] and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying 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, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Summary of Message

People inside and outside of the church shy away from speaking about issues like spiritual warfare. With respect to Christianity, they love talking about how Jesus taught us to love, but they're somewhat reticent when it comes to supernatural phenomena—the incarnation, resurrection, spiritual warfare. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that life isn't just about “flesh and blood” and that there are transcendent realities that deeply influence the tangible world.

In today's message we were reminded of four things concerning the devil. First, he *does* exist, though we like to think otherwise. Moreover, he is a force to be reckoned with (hence, the exhortation to “take up the full armor of God). Third, though he is often portrayed as a silly red man with horns coming out, he is, in fact, a crafty and methodical person. Finally, he is someone that each person will have to deal with on a personal level. While we want to avoid the error of obsessing over the devil and demonology in general, we want to avoid the opposite error of supposing he does not exist at all.

Though many tend to dismiss the devil's existence and sneer at those who believe in his influence, such a position leaves one unable to account for the rampant evil we see all around us. The modern (or postmodern) tendency is to try to reduce evil along sociological, familial, neurological, etc. lines. At the end of the day, such a “flesh-and-blood-worldview” strips one of the resources for understanding the evil we experience and observe. (See Pastor Paul's comments on the movie “Silence of the Lambs.”)

Three preliminary responses were suggested in the message. First, there ought to be a *balanced* awareness. Again, while we want to avoid obsessing over the devil, we must, at the same time, be mindful of the fact that a spiritual war is taking place. Second, the imagery of a soldier teaches us that our lives should be characterized by discipline. For parents, it's worthwhile to consider whether this sense is being conveyed to the children. Finally, we must

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bear in mind that “the call to arms” really is nothing other than another way of describing our faith-union with Christ Jesus. The realities of spiritual warfare focus our eyes on the One who has both already triumphed through the resurrection and who has provided for all we need to be victorious in this lifetime.

1. How do you feel about what the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6,10-20? Does the talk about the devil and spiritual warfare make you uncomfortable? If so, please explain why.
2. In the preface to *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” Which way do you tend to err towards? Which way does our church tend to err towards? What do you think are the consequences of our erring towards one end or the other?
3. The passage teaches us for things about the devil: (1) his existence; (2) his power; (3) his wit; (4) his “personal” nature, i.e., he seeks to destroy every individual. How do these truths compare to the way you have understood the devil? What attribute of the devil do you tend to forget in your own struggle with sin and temptation?
4. Share an instance when you either experienced or observed an evil in your life that challenged the “flesh-and-blood” approach to explaining evil. How did such an experience lead you to suppose that there is more than “flesh and blood involved”?
5. “How now shall we live” in light of the fact that our struggle is not purely against “flesh and blood”? What does “balanced awareness” look like in your life? How should your lifestyle change in light of the fact that you have been called to be strong as a soldier of Christ? How does this calling affect the way you parent?
6. How does Ephesians 6,10-20 deepen your appreciation for Jesus Christ and the faith-union we have with him? After all, every teaching of Scripture should lead to a deeper love for Who He is and what He has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection.

Close by meditating on the second verse to “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”:

Did we in our own strength confide
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his Name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.