

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE

“We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Christians are often engaged in spiritual warfare. It’s part of our life. As long as we are in this life, we will be engaged in spiritual warfare. Listen to this: (Ephesians 6:10-13)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Does it shock you to hear that, as a Christian, you may indeed have to contend from time to time against the devil? And you may not even know it is happening. You may not see it because it all seems to be right here in front of you: very real people doing evil things or causing evil to happen, or bad circumstances and events that are out of your control? I sure faced it one weekend when we took a large number of teenagers off for a Happening weekend to introduce them to Christ. On Saturday evening, everything went wrong. Some of the adults weren’t where they should have been, kids got into trouble, people were in tears and we almost got kicked out of the retreat center. All of this happened in a very short period of time, and at the most important part of the weekend. I stopped everything, got all the leaders together and we went into the chapel and prayed for God to resolve it all. And He did. The weekend was very important in our ministry to the teens. It turned out very well, but I promised we’d never do this kind of conference again without being surrounded from start to finish with serious prayer.

St Paul said we are contending against the schemes of the devil, against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. That’s a pretty evil lot. It describes all of Satan’s dominion. The schemes of the devil may not be big events, like the Happening weekend, but just a lot of bad things happening in a row, things clearly not of God’s will. And if Satan is involved and is not stopped, these are the kind of things that might happen:

- You start to lose your own confidence.
- You begin to question your faith in God.
- There is a lot of confusion and chaos.
- Animosity and contention arise between people for no good reason.
- Whatever good ministry you are doing begins to fall on its face.
- and peace is being robbed from your heart.

These are signs of demonic activity. And when you see them happening, that's when you fight back. We call it spiritual warfare.

St Paul was engaged in spiritual warfare all the time. He didn't see dark clouds or hear haunting voices, it was people doing evil things to keep the good news of Jesus Christ from spreading. Some of those people were Romans, some were Jews, some were false Christians misleading others away, and some of the battles he faced were even inside him.

One of the classic examples of demonic attack was Job. Listen to this.

Now there was a day when Satan came before the Lord. The LORD said to Satan, 'Whence have you come?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?' Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand.' So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD."

In one day's time, all of Job's livestock were destroyed - all his oxen, donkeys, sheep, and camels - all his wealth - and all Job's servants as well. And worse yet, all his children were killed in a terrible tragedy. All this is a single day. "Then Job arose," it says, "and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.'" Now, we know the conversation between God and Satan is really a kind of folklore. But we need to look at the teaching points. Was it Job's fault that these things have happened? Had he been bad and is being punished? No, in fact, he was considered the most righteous man on earth. Was it just coincidence that these bad things happened? Just bad luck? No, it was quite clear the devil is responsible. This tragedy was no coincidence.

Satan will attack us. And he will try to get us to turn away from trusting in God. In the epistle St Paul said, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Satan's goal is to entice us from trusting and obeying God, and trust, instead, in the world and in ourselves. Satan would have us put our minds on the flesh, just as he did to Eve in the Garden of Eden. He convinced her to listen and trust in her own thoughts and perceptions rather than God's.

I know many people who do that - set their minds on themselves and the things of this world.

You know what? They never get attacked by Satan, they never have to contend with him; he's got them where he wants.

But Satan has only limited power. It says to stand against the "schemes of the devil." That's really all he has. "Schemes" can be translated deceits, seductions and lies. That's it; that's all he has. "Satan does not have the power to physically harm you, force you to act, nor does he wield any power over you. Satan is a caged lion that seeks to devour. He can only devour those he can convince to come into his territory by submitting to him." He makes a lot of noise and very cleverly seduces people through his lies. But beyond that he has no power over us.

Now, what do we do when we recognize spiritual warfare happening in our own lives? St Paul said, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." To start, we don't have to fight alone. The strength to conduct spiritual warfare comes from God. It is IN us, but it comes from God. "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world," wrote St John. Satan is no match for God. It's God's power that wins. The whole idea is for us to wake up and realize that, as St Paul put it, we are NOT "contending against flesh and blood." The war is NOT on our level. It is "against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness." We fight spiritual wars with spiritual weapons.

And the first weapon is prayer. Spiritual warfare is fought on our knees - plain and simple. The bigger the problem the more urgently and forcefully we pray. The longer the problem lasts, the longer we pray. We do not give up. We pray without ceasing and call upon the power of God in heaven to come in force.

The second weapon is to pray with authority. When God gave us His power, He gave us the authority to use it. St James wrote, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It's interesting how most if not all the New testament writers each dealt with demonic activity and spiritual warfare. It doesn't say call on God to resist the devil on your behalf. It doesn't say, "Ask the devil to go and he might." It says, "Resist him and he will!" "In the name of Jesus, I resist you."

So, we recognize that what is happening comes from the devil. We pray fervently and without ceasing. And we pray with authority against it. St Peter wrote, "Your adversary, the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." He wants to cause havoc among the people who trust in God. But to those of us who recognize him and the nature of his work, we know how to resist him with authority and pray in the strength of the Lord. If we fight spiritual warfare with the spiritual weapons God has given us, we WILL win.