

“Spiritual Warfare Part 1” Ephesians 6 Steve Harden 11/28/21

I suppose through the years I've had the opportunity to have thousands of conversations with people suffering in difficult situations, difficult relationships, conflict. I really can't argue with Solomon in Ecclesiastes when he basically says, 'Life is a few days of trouble,' and it is, right? You know it and I know it. In all those conversations, I can't remember even one time where someone recognized that there was something going on that they couldn't see, something beyond their perception that was influencing that situation, and I've got to say that I'm the same way. I have had some conflicts just like everyone else, right? I've struggled with some people at times when they have either harmed me or more importantly, harmed the ones that I love, papa bear comes out, right? In those moments, I don't tend to think that there is something more going on here than that rascal that did that! Something beyond what I recognize. Always, my focus is on the other person, but our text says this morning very, very clearly that the reality is that there is more going on than what I can see! When Paul says, "We wrestle not with flesh and blood," that means that person that has harmed my loved one is not my primary enemy! He is not my primary opponent, and that catches me off guard! I'm not looking for that! Paul seems to be saying, that guy is giving me so much grief, but it's not him primarily that's giving me the grief, the real culprits in the battle are those that I cannot see. The subject of Satan, demons, the devil and what happens in that spiritual realm tends to just freak us out! Am I the only one? Right? Maybe we saw too many horror movies growing up, I'm not sure, but it could be! Or maybe we just recognize that there is a great enemy. Oh, I didn't turn loose the kids! Is everybody gone? 4-7-year old's that want to go to class? Okay thanks. Alright. Sorry buddy! I'm out of practice. Now they wonder really what is going on here when we go to class, right?

Okay. It's because we just don't understand. It kind of freaks us out because we really don't understand what's happening, because we can't see it. We tend to ignore what we don't understand or diminish the importance or the reality of what we don't understand, and we do so to our detriment! The truth is that if you are a child of God, you do have an enemy, and he is strong and he is powerful and he has a whole army of people doing his bidding, and there is nothing that he would like more than to destroy you and destroy your faith, to take away any love of God from you and those that you care about! He would rob you of joy and comfort and significance. He will seek to encourage you to be bitter and unforgiving and angry and to feel inferior and unloved and misunderstood. That's who he is and that's what he does. That's what the Bible says! He is the father of lies and that's what he does, and he has done it for a very long time, and he's good at it. He will tell you things that are totally contrary to the word of God, those things that we know with our heads are true, and yet in our hearts, we tend not to believe. So, today and two more weeks in the future, I'm going to share a little bit about the reality of this, what we call spiritual warfare, because I don't want you to be caught unawares.

So, today we're going to be looking at the reality, the adversary, and the peril of our spiritual conflict. Alright, the reality of the conflict. It does seem like there's a reticence, a resistance to talking about spiritual warfare among contemporary conservative circles. Have you noticed that? Am I the only one? It just seems like it's not a subject that comes up very often, not very many books are written about it, and I've often wondered why. Why is it that those of us who really love the word of God and are really strong in understanding theology and doctrine and the Scriptures, why do we find it so hard to talk about? I have two different things that I've thought of through the years as I've pondered this.

First of all is it's just so mysterious. It doesn't fit well in my box! Things happen that I can't explain, and I don't understand so I tend to run from the things that I don't understand, that I can't explain. We're just not comfortable with mystery, and so I think that's part of it. Some of it is that we have some brothers in other traditions who have gone way off the charts in regard to spiritual warfare, and so, what we tend to do is if somebody is going off over here, we tend to swing like a pendulum and go too far to the other side, and I think that's part of it too. Where the truth is found in the middle, we react and go too far away. Our role is to really go as far as Scripture goes and no farther. That's the goal.

But it's interesting to me that the theologians of old had no reticence at all in talking about spiritual warfare. If you read the old guys, they talk about it all the time. William Gurnall was a puritan who wrote a three-volume set called "The Christian in Complete Armor" that I don't think has ever been out of print. It is a classic. It is all about the text that we read this morning! John Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Holy War." It's all about spiritual warfare! It's what it's about! Jonathan Edwards, arguably the greatest theologian in America, wrote about it all the time during the Second Great Awakening! So, the theologians of old, the preachers of old had no qualms in saying you're in a battle, a conflict, spiritual warfare! But a lot more importantly, Scripture is not afraid of it. We find it throughout the Scripture. The Apostle Paul dealt with it often. He wrote the text that we read here in Ephesians. We'll come back to that in just a little bit. But all throughout his letters he's talking about the conflict. I was going to talk about it later but there are about thirty-five times in the gospels where Jesus cast out demons! He certainly wasn't afraid to talk about it, right?

In the book of Ephesians, I think that the whole book has been leading toward this discussion of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6. It took me a little while to come to that conclusion, but I think this has been Paul's goal all along. Talking about the Christian armor is not an afterthought for him! This not wrapping up loose ends, we're going to close out our letter. This is where he's been heading the whole time! Let me just kind of walk with you through Ephesians a little bit. It's harder if you've got the Scripture on your phone but track with me a little bit.

In chapter 1, we see that Paul establishes our identity in Christ. There is no way to stand firm as he says in Ephesians 6 unless your identity is firmly found in Christ and that's what he establishes in chapter 1. In chapter 2 he introduces to us a contrast regarding the believer in terms of what you once were, and what you are now. You were once under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, but now you are no longer in that kingdom. Once you were dead to your sins, now you have been made alive in Christ. You'll see this contrast presented all throughout the book of Ephesians. You were once under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, and now you are made alive in Christ. Chapter 3:10 we see that when God went public with His plan of salvation, the gospel, the mystery of the gospel as he describes it, angels and demons alike were surprised! They were in awe of this great plan of salvation.

In chapter 4:26 he speaks of the danger of being angry, being bitter, and letting the sun go down, he says it gives the devil an opportunity to influence your life! It gives the devil an opportunity. In chapter 5, again, verse 8, it says to live as children of the light, not as children of the darkness. Again, that contrast, two people. Ephesians 5:18, "Do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit," and so, the rest of the book is talking about what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit means to be directed, permeated, controlled by the word of God. That's where we find this great gem of what we call spiritual warfare: "Be filled with Spirit and stand firm in your faith"!

So again, I say, chapter 6 is not an addendum, it's not just wrapping things up, but it's the climactic end to this great book. Paul says, 'I have given you everything you need to stand firm from chapter 1 to right now! Now run your race.' He wasn't afraid to talk about spiritual warfare. Did Jesus not teach us to pray "Deliver us from the evil one"? If theologians of old, and Paul, and Jesus considered that our enemy was real and wrote to equip us in the fight, we are fools if we ignore the instruction, or if we just pretend that it really doesn't have anything to do with us. Do I have agreement on that? Is that true? Do not ignore the evidence. So, the reality of the conflict.

Secondly, your adversary in the conflict. I believe the Bible is clear that Lucifer was one of the first created beings when God created the heavens and the earth. He, along with Michael the archangel, and Gabriel the archangel, he was one of the top three. He was one of the archangels. We don't have time to go to the text, but you can jot it down, it's Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and then again in Revelation 12. I think all of these refer to this falling of Lucifer. Lucifer was said to be a beautiful, musical, wise archangel, superior angel, blameless in his ways, a perfect creature. But then, pride took over. He wanted to become just like God. He wanted the authority that God had over His creation, and he and a third of his angels mounted an insurrection against God and God put him down very quickly it's said. He threw him out of his heaven.

Upon being thrown out of heaven he comes to the earth in the garden of Eden in the form of a serpent and decides to tempt Adam and Eve, man, the one who was made a little lower than the angels, the apple of God's eye, to tempt him in the same way that Satan rebelled against God, to rebel against God's authority. You know the story of man's fall. He fell and we've been suffering the consequences ever since. He failed because of his rebellion and his frustrated attempt to be like God. Now after the fall in Genesis 3, God says, 'I'm going to send someone to bruise your head. You'll bruise his heel, but He'll bruise your head,' talking about the Messiah, Christ, to win the final victory. 1 John 3:8 says, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." That's what is happening even now from the beginning of Genesis to even now, He is destroying the works of Satan. The victory has been won, but until Jesus returns in that final day of victory, we continue in the battle. We continue in the conflict.

Now, just so you know, Satan is this being's personal name. It means 'The Great Opposer,' which is perfect, right? He is the one who opposes God and everything that is right and good. The devil, then, is his position, what he is, or what he does. It's the title, 'Accuser,' one who accuses you. 'Are you really the child of God? Have you really got faith? Does God really love *you*?' All those things we'll talk about more later, but he is the one who accuses you. Now, you remember, in the conversation about a third of the angels went with him, right? Those fallen angels, those ones who were frustrated in the coup against God are called demons now. They are fallen angels. We don't know how many there are, we just know that there are a lot, a third of the angels! We don't know how many angels there are except that we read in the Scripture there are myriads and myriads. So, just a point of clarification, when we deal in this arena, we're not really dealing with Satan, himself, because he's not omnipresent. He's not God. But he has a lot of fallen angels, a lot of demons to do his bidding. So, that's really who we're dealing with in our spiritual warfare. Frankly, probably none of us are going to be as important as some others for Satan to deal with directly. There are probably bigger fish to fry than us, so we'll probably never deal with him directly. But he works through these minions, these fallen angels.

Let me read our text again, verse 12 of Ephesians 6: “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.” Here Paul specifies four different ranks or categories of the demonic horde. We don’t really know what those four different roles of those are. We know it’s four different categories because he uses the word ‘against’ four times: “against the rulers, against the authorities,” etc. So, he’s categorizing them somehow. Now, no one knows for sure, but let me just throw out some possibilities for you. The rulers are the ranks of demons that have some kind of authority to give orders to other demons. Powers, somehow, they have authority and power to carry out some orders of the rulers. World forces is an interesting one. I won’t be dogmatic, please understand, but I wonder if it’s not geographic jurisdiction there somehow. Do you remember back in Daniel 10:12-13 when we read of an angel who is visiting Daniel that said he had been wrestling with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, the demon, and he wrestled with him twenty-one days until Michael the archangel could come help him. Now, there’s a lot there I don’t understand, but it seems like there was a demonic presence there that had authority in the kingdom of Persia. And then the spiritual forces of wickedness, there are differing views, but my guess is that those are ones that we truly do battle with.

But I come back to my opening statement, guys. I know at times it sure feels like I am battling flesh and blood, that obnoxious fellow worker at work. You know who I’m talking about, right? Or maybe it’s closer to home! Maybe it’s that husband or that wife that just is not doing what I think they should be doing, or maybe parent or child! It so often feels like my primary opponent is real flesh and blood. It’s easy to think that he’s my primary enemy, but we really need to train our mind to the fact that there’s more going on than what I can see. You have an unseen enemy who will use whatever situation they can to harm you.

Reality, adversity, now let’s just look at the perils of the conflict. If you’re a Christian, my friend, you’re in this. You can’t opt out. I’m sorry! Now, it’d be really easy to say, ‘Yeah, that’s not for me, Steve. I don’t want to deal with that kind of stuff,’ but sorry. If you’re a child of God, you’re in it. The stakes are high. This enemy, if allowed, will do everything that he can to harm you, and that means physically. Do you remember Abel? Do you remember Job? The prophets? Jesus? That means spiritually! He will seek to render you ineffective in your faith, to discredit your King. That’s what he wants. He will seek to rob you of any joy and confidence that you have in your faith. That’s what he does. That’s what he’s been doing for a long time. Again, you wrestle not with flesh and blood. It’s serious!

When I think of wrestling, I think of high school, because that’s really the last time I had any contact with wrestling. There are the round ballers and the mat lickers, I don’t know if that’s too old or not, I don’t know. We had that friendly competition of who was more skilled and all of that, but I was on the round baller side I’ll just admit that to you, but I had really great friends who were the mat lickers and they wore the title proudly, they did. Some of the strongest, physically fit, toughest guys I knew were wrestlers. Man, they pulled twenty pounds! That was unheard of for me in high school. No way! That was enough to turn me to basketball. But they were tough! Whenever I think of wrestling, I think of those matches and I think about how they’d go out and they would exert all their strength, all their endurance, all they had, they’d leave it all on the mat so to speak, and then one person would win, one would lose, and they would stand and shake hands and go their way, right? That’s my picture of wrestling. That has exactly zero to do with what Paul was thinking when he wrote, “You wrestle not with flesh and blood.”

You see, in Paul's day it was only the slaves that would wrestle. No freemen, only slaves. There were no time limits. There were no rest periods. You fought your opponent until one of you could not get up anymore. The victor would then put his foot on the neck of the one who had lost and call for the sword, and he would use that sword to blind the defeated opponent. The one who was defeated in the ring would live the rest of his life blind and disgraced because he had lost the conflict. The victor would then go free with his family. They would be given their freedom! There is a lot of difference between what Paul had in mind, and what I have in mind when I think of wrestling. Paul said, "You wrestle not with flesh and blood"! He raises the stakes so high! He gives us a picture, I think, to shake us out of our complacency! Our blissful ignorance, if you will. Your enemy is real, and he plays for keeps. He will disgrace you. He will bring misery to you. But my friends, we are called to fight the good fight and to stand firm! This enemy will destroy you if given opportunity.

Now, what does this mean for me, Steve? Let's wrap it up here. What does it mean to me? I understand that I probably incurred more questions today than I brought answers. I trust that some of those answers will be coming in the days ahead but let me suggest three take-aways for you, today, with what we've been provided.

First of all, spiritual warfare is real. You should not be ignorant as a believer that this is real. You have an enemy of your soul. Evil is not simply an ideology or a principle or a force. No, it's centered in a person. There is a literal Satan who literally was thrown out of heaven, who literally tempted Eve in the garden and exists now. Our fight is against an enemy. It's not just a force or a principle. Look, Jesus did not cast out an ideology thirty-five times in the gospels. He just didn't do it. He cast out the demonic beings. Your enemy is powerful and organized and he will destroy you and everyone you love. They seek to stop the advance of the gospel in this place and he has no qualms with doing whatever he can to make that happen. Next time we'll look more closely at the arsenal that he uses, but let's just say, his arsenal, his tools that he uses, have been very effective over thousands of years. Don't think that you're smarter than he is, because you're not. You ignore his intentions to the peril of your soul. Let me read to you a quote. "Only eternity will reveal the number of believers who have led unproductive, frustrated lives, and of the Christian workers who have been forced to forsake their mission. This happens in spite of the fact that New Testament warnings concerning demonic activity are all addressed to believers. How resist got changed to ignore in so many segments of the church, I don't know. When it did however, Satan and his forces gained a great strategic advantage." You can't say that anymore. Resist.

The second thing to carry away is there's really no reason for fear as a believer. We win! We win. You face a formidable foe. He will rob life of meaning and purpose. He will seek to harm you physically, mentally, spiritually, and your family as well. He is one of the strongest beings in the universe. He has an army behind him to do his bidding. And yet, there is still no reason for fear! I tell you these things not to make you afraid, but to encourage you to think, 'Not here. Not now. Not in my house.' For something deep within you to rise up and say, 'No! I will not. I will not be tempted to go down the path of bitterness and unforgiveness and anger. Because I know that those things are what you will use to destroy me and my family and we're not having it here.' Stand firm in your fight! In Christ, we are more than conquerors because we've been placed into a kingdom of light, and having trusted in Jesus, in His death and resurrection and intercession before the Father for us right now, we have nothing to fear! The only thing that we have to fear is refusing to confess and repent of my sin, because that's an open door and the devil will take that opportunity to work against you. "Greater is He who is in you,

than he who is in the world.” Stand firm. Stand strong. It doesn’t matter how strong my adversary is when God is on my side!

And finally, guys, the danger is real. Your eternal destiny is safe, but don’t open yourself up to the attacks of the enemy. Don’t forfeit your security, your peace, your joy, your well-being, or your influence, by listening to the lies of the enemy! Don’t open that door. There is so much pain, so much suffering that is brought onto us because of our refusal to simply fall on our face and confess our sins and be cleansed over and over and over again. That’s all it takes. Stand firm in the Lord and in the strength of His might that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Let’s pray.