

Soldier Up!

Saints & Spiritual Warfare

From beginning to end, the Bible is a book describing a war:

- In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, God spoke of ultimate fighting when He told the serpent that "He [would] bruise [his] head," while the serpent would "bruise His heel" (3:15). It wasn't a one-time match; it was a description of the unfolding of human history, of two kingdoms that would, for an age, be in constant conflict.
- In the end, in the Book of the Revelation, there is one last serpent-led battle on the earth, for the earth, before he is cast alive into the Lake of Fire to be tormented in defeat forever and ever (20:7-10).

Between Genesis and the Revelation is a record of the serpent's constant interference with the plan of God to come into the human race as a man.

The serpent, who is Satan, is powerful. We are told that Satan is "the prince of this world" (John 12:31) and "the god of this age" (Second Corinthians 4:4). John writes, in his first letter, that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (5:19).

Satan goes about, on the earth, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (First Peter 5:8).

Satan is not alone in his opposition to God. The Old Testament informs us that one-third of the created angels rebelled with Satan and now work with him and against God.

These are described as principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

We see one of these minions, briefly but terrifyingly, in the Book of Daniel. As Daniel prayed, God dispatched Gabriel to him, to deliver the famous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. Gabriel was delayed, however, in a struggle with a demon called the Prince of Persia.

Dan 10:13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

A major part of Jesus' ministry in His first coming was to overcome the power of the devil.

- Jesus battled Satan, and defeated him, one-on-one in the temptation in the wilderness.
- He went about casting out demons, delivering their hosts from all manner of evil they were inflicting.
- At one point He landed on a beach, almost like a military invasion, and did battle with a legion of demons, soundly trouncing them.

He explained to His disciples that He had the power to "bind the strong man," referring to Satan, and establish in place of his rule, the kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

The leaders of the nation of Israel rejected Jesus, and with Him, their kingdom. The devil, who would have been bound, was allowed to run free - to roam about as the devouring lion, seeking to rob, kill, and destroy.

He will be bound one day. Describing the Second Coming, John wrote,

Rev 20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

Rev 20:2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

Rev 20:3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished...

After the thousand years of the kingdom of Heaven on earth the devil will be released, but only for a short while before he is cast alive into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

We live in this present evil age, ruled by the devil, looking forward to the age to come, and to eternity beyond that.

It's a war zone. We are soldiers in a spiritual war.

Here's the thing. While we all, as Christians, consent to the truth that we are soldiers, we need to come to the awareness we are not weekend warriors.

We are not reservists who may or may not be called into active duty. And there is no term to our tour of duty; we are lifers in the Lord's army.

We - all of us - are on the battlefield. And that's why I'm calling this series on spiritual warfare, *Soldier Up*.

I want us to gain a warfare worldview. One of the books I'm reading puts it this way:

There is a tendency for people in some circles to think of spiritual warfare as a specialized form of ministry rather than as a descriptive phrase characterizing our common struggle as believers. Thus, for many people, to speak of spiritual warfare is to speak of exorcism, deliverance ministry, taking authority in the name of Jesus against the enemy, or special forms of authoritative prayer. Certainly these are all aspects of spiritual warfare, but no single ministry exhausts our understanding of spiritual warfare. We need to begin thinking about spiritual warfare in a broader way. Spiritual warfare is a way of characterizing our common struggle as Christians. Whether we want to think about it or not, the truth is that we all face supernatural opposition as we set out to live the Christian life.

Another author wrote, more bluntly:

Jesus' teaching, His exorcisms, His healings and other miracles... remain somewhat incoherent and unrelated to one another until we interpret them... as acts of war.

We've said that the warfare worldview began in the Garden of Eden and it persists throughout the Bible until the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in the last chapters of the Bible's last book. What that means is we could put in almost anywhere in the Bible and talk about spiritual warfare; or, at the very least, we should have it as our worldview, and comment on it, as we are reading and studying anywhere in the Word.

Still, there are a few major, classic passages that especially highlight spiritual warfare:

- Ephesians chapter six has to be high on that list, for it is there we are told to "put on the whole armor of God" in order to "stand" against our adversary and his principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness.
- Second Corinthians ten comes to mind, for there we are told to tear down enemy strongholds.
- The devil's temptation of Jesus has to be on any list of Scriptures about spiritual warfare.
- We've got to take a look at Daniel ten and the angelic wrestling match.

Those are just a few of the passages we will look at. I want to begin with a passage in Ephesians that gives us a balanced perspective on our overall approach to spiritual warfare.

When you mention "spiritual warfare," there is a tendency to think of only one dimension of it - the demonic. Possessions, exorcisms, the occult - things along those lines.

Our warfare is far broader in its scope.

The devil and his ilk are not our only enemies. The world and our flesh, along with the devil, are the three things we are at war against.

Ephesians 2:1-3 mentions them all:

Eph 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

Eph 2:2 in which you once walked according to the course of this **world**, according to **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,

Eph 2:3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the **lusts of our flesh**, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Prior to meeting Jesus Christ, you have no spiritual life. You are spiritually dead. You are physically dying. And, if you continue as you were born, you will experience what the Bible calls "the second death," which is a resurrection to judgment and eternal suffering in Hell.

God the Holy Spirit is in the world seeking to convict men, women, and children of sin, of righteousness, and of the judgment to come. By His grace, The Lord frees the will so that a person can choose to repent and receive Jesus as their Savior.

A way of describing this transformation is to say that God has "delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love... (Colossians 1:13).

You were under the power of darkness - a captive of the devil, in his kingdom. When you get saved, you are delivered from his kingdom and conveyed into God's kingdom.

You therefore need no longer be subject to the power of the world or the devil or the flesh.

What do we mean by "the world?" The world consists, in part, of the ungodly, and therefore spiritually unhealthy, influences that exert pressure on us everyday to disregard or disobey God. It is everything and anything that opposes God or minimizes His centrality.

What do we mean by "the flesh?" The flesh is not my physical body and its normal appetites and drives. It is something that is left over after I am saved, lingering evilly in my mind, a propensity to desire sin, a lusting after fulfilling my appetites in sinful ways.

The devil is a personal being, a fallen angel, bent on destroying you on account of his long war against God. He and his followers are expert at using the world to appeal to your flesh to bring you back into slavery to sin.

Let me give one prime, contemporary example of the three working together against you.

One of the devil's most effective strategies today is pornography. The world system that he rules over has relaxed most moral standards and simultaneously made pornography available to almost anyone at any given moment.

It appeals to the lust of the flesh that we find lingering in our minds.

It is destroying marriages and churches, not to mention how it undermines society as a whole. 50% of Christian men, and 20% of Christian woman, admit to being addicted to pornography. The average age when a child is exposed to pornography is 11, but it's getting lower every time the question is put.

It is the devil using the world against your flesh to rob, to kill, and to destroy.

To wage spiritual warfare as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, you must be aware of these enemies working in harmony against you.

But more than that: You must believe that having been "delivered... from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love," you need never yield yourself to them.

I'm not suggesting you will never sin. You will; I will; until we are free from our flesh and in our glorified bodies.

I am suggesting that we can be successful as soldiers battling the world, the devil, and the flesh.

That's because we are not alone battling against these foes and forces. If we were, we'd be toast.

God empowers us through His indwelling Holy Spirit through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 1:19-22, the apostle Paul explained it like this:

Eph 1:19 ... the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

Eph 1:20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

Eph 1:21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Eph 1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

Jesus triumphed over the kingdom of Satan at the Cross. Since we are in Him, seated with Him in Heaven, we can draw from His triumph, and triumph ourselves.

I mentioned earlier that Jesus had bound the strong man but, when He was rejected, Satan was loosed, and remains on the loose, robbing, killing, and destroying.

Satan may not be bound, but - if you are a believer - neither can he hold you captive against your will.

In Colossians 2:15 we read,

Col 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Satan and his hoards have been "disarmed" at the Cross, for those who come to the Cross and are saved.

Likewise there are passages that tell us we no longer need yield ourselves to the flesh; or be overcome by the world.

Not only that: As we share the Gospel, we plunder the possessions of the strong man, winning souls to Christ.

We do not "bind" Satan; that is done for us by our Lord. What we do is release those he holds bound. We plunder his kingdom with the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation.

If there is a key, then, to spiritual warfare, it is this: To be, and to go on being, Spirit-filled. Alone, we would be no match for our enemies.

But we are never alone.