

Spiritual Warfare and the Supremacy of Christ (II Corinthians)

In this session I want to present some of the Biblical foundations of what we call “spiritual warfare” (a term coined by Paul in 2 Cor. 10). The paradigm of conflict, war and confrontation between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of darkness is thoroughly Biblical. But unfortunately it’s a profoundly misunderstood subject within the Body of Christ. By and large, two unbiblical extremes exist: **First**, there are those who reject the subject altogether because of an unwarranted rejection of Satan, the demonic realm and the super-natural; that is, the objective existence Satan’s person and work and his influence on the earth. And **second**, there are those who affirm the existence of Satan’s person and work but with an unwarranted bent and an inappropriate over-emphasis due to a misunderstanding of the text and context upon which their warfare theology is founded upon. One view is a sort of vague theistic naturalism that denies the existence of the supernatural realm and the other is a Satan-centric theology that dishonours the New Testament and paints spiritual warfare as a sort of dualism where God and Satan are equal in power and influence. In this session my hope is to combat both of these false ideologies by presenting the simple New Testament truths concerning spiritual warfare. Most of the passages that we’ll look at are found within 2 Corinthians where Paul speaks extensively about Satan and his objective in the nations.

“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.” (C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*)

I. A FOUNDATIONAL PREMISE: THE PREMINENCE OF CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:17-18)

- A. This statement comes on the heels of a weighty string of sentences about the glory of Christ (Col. 1:13-20). At the end Paul says that THEREFORE Christ is to be seen as preeminent and supreme in ALL things. For our purposes in these sessions, I would say, even in spiritual warfare. If Christ is to be preeminent in our eating, sleeping, working, playing, thinking, praying, preaching and every other THING, then surely Christ is to be preeminent in spiritual warfare.
- B. The way we avoid these extremes and the way our hearts are guarded from deception is by contending for Christ to be preeminent in all things; that is, contending for sight, sight of the things about Jesus that are the grounds of His supremacy and preeminence. If the supremacy of Christ is not the centrepiece of our spiritual warfare theology we will fall into error.
- C. In fact, if the glory of Christ is not the central pillar of *everything* – not just spiritual warfare – we will fall into disastrous error. In his commentary on Romans John Stott writes this:

“The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when

we contemplate the wrath of God...), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ...Only one imperialism is Christian...and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire.”¹

- D. So with this foundational premise of the preeminence of Christ in all things in place, I have 3 goals in this session:
1. Present, Establish and Defend the reality of cosmic warfare between Godly and Satanic powers and principalities
 2. Explain the conflict within the “big picture” of God’s eternal purpose
 3. Explain the posture of heart that is mandated in Scripture from which to engage in spiritual warfare
- E. One of the reasons why so much bad teaching on spiritual warfare exists and persists within much of the Body of Christ (among those who affirm it and reject it) is because it is most often taught by those who do not teach exegetically. Meaning, they string together many verses and do not honor the context of any of them to develop their theology of spiritual warfare. So in this session, to be safe and honouring to the word, we’re going to go through the book of II Corinthians as Paul speaks of Satan and spiritual warfare there more than any other epistle.

II. SIX FOUNDATIONAL PASSAGES ABOUT SPIRITUAL WARFARE FROM II CORINTHIANS

- A. 2 Corinthians 2:11

...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs/schemes. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

1. A parallel passage would be Ephesians 6:

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. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

- B. 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

¹ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 53.

1. The structure of this passage is important to understand. It is comprised of 9 propositions:
 - a. The Gospel (a term that Paul has yet to develop) is veiled to some
 - b. Those who cannot see the Gospel have been blinded
 - c. Satan is responsible for this blindness (in concert with humanity's depravity)

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. (Ephesians 4:17-19)

- d. The object that perishing unbelievers are blinded from is light
 - e. The "light" is "of the Gospel"
 - f. The "Gospel" is "of" a "glory"
 - g. The "glory" is "of Christ"
 - h. Christ is the "image of God"
 - i. Satan's work is thwarted and sight is given when God "speaks" to the darkened mind as in Genesis 1 when He spoke to a darkened world
2. The chief purpose of God in the nations of the earth is to glorify His Son to the creation. Satan understands this end. And thus his primary objective is to undermine that purpose. That's why these statements in 2 Corinthians 4:2-6 comes on the heels of 2 Corinthians 3:18:

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

- C. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

1. In Paul's mind, the world is entrenched in a war; a war that is being waged with divine power; a war that is being waged to "destroy strongholds."
2. In the next sentence Paul explains what he meant by "destroying strongholds." A stronghold is an "argument" or a "lofty opinion" that is exalted higher than the knowledge of God (which is in the face of Christ).
3. As we destroy the strongholds of arguments that attack the glory of God we "take captive" THOUGHTS. A thought is a propositional truth about the nature of God.

D. 2 Corinthians 11:2-4:

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:2-4)

1. In Paul's mind, spiritual warfare is centered around how we relate to Jesus. The root of Satanic deception is being led away from simple, sincere and pure devotion to Jesus.
2. Satan is responsible for a different "Jesus," a different "spirit" and a different "Gospel" being "proclaimed." The key word here is "proclaimed." An integral part of spiritual warfare is proclaiming true or false propositions about Jesus.

E. 2 Corinthians 11:10-15

As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:10-15)

F. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

III. UNDERSTANDING THE "SCHEMES" OF SATAN AND THE WAY WARFARE IS WAGED

...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

A. Scheme #1 – The World

1. What is meant by the term “world” in its negative sense? The world is an organized system in opposition and rebellion against God. Richard Lovelace says, “The world is corporate flesh and the structures it produces.” In 1 John 2:16 the world is defined as the following:
 - a. Lust of the flesh (wanting physical desires)
 - b. Lust of the eye (wanting beautiful externals)
 - c. Boastful pride of life (selfish ambition)
2. In response to the world, Scripture commands us to:
 - a. Not love it/hate it (1 John 2:15)
 - b. Not let it shape our values (Rom. 12:2)
 - c. Live through Jesus as crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14)

B. Scheme #2 – The Flesh

1. The flesh refers to our capacity and disposition to put self-interests above God. In short, the flesh is an internal resistance to obey God (Mark 7:21–23; Gal. 5:19–21; Col.3:5–8; James 1:14–15).
2. In response to the flesh, Scripture instructs Christians to:
 - a. Recognize that they are no longer under the flesh’s bondage (Rom. 6)
 - b. Walk in conscious submission to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
 - c. Put to death (mortify) sinful desires (Rom. 8:13–16)

C. Scheme #3 – The Devil

1. **Primary Objectives – Distort (Lie) and Destroy (Murder)**

*You are of your father **the devil**, and your will is to do **your father's desires**. He was **a murderer from the beginning**, and has **nothing to do with the truth**, because there is no truth in him. When **he lies**, he speaks out of his own character, **for he is a liar and the father of lies**. (John 8:44)*

- a. **He is a Liar** – The most prevalent manifestation of this objective is false doctrine. A false doctrine is a propositional ‘truth’ that is in opposition to truth; and truth is a person.
- b. **He is a Murderer** – His objective is to kill. Not just physically, but eternally. He has been judicially condemned to eternal punishment by God and He holds that accusation over our lives and demands that God honor His justice by condemning us too. When we are born again and the blood of Christ is applied to us Satan’s condemnation is nullified. (Piper – “God has de-fanged Satan through the cross of Christ. All he can do is gum us.”)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

2. Ordinary Demonic

Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his book *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*, speaks of the ordinary demonic as Satan coming to us as our Tempter and baiting our hook with various pleasure and temptations, including:

- a. Sexual sin (1 Cor. 7:5)
- b. Marriage between Christians and non-Christians (2 Cor. 6:14-16)
- c. False religion, false teaching, false Jesus (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 1 Tim. 4:1–2; 2 Cor. 11:1–4)
- d. Bitterness (Eph. 4:17–5:2)
- e. Foolishness and drunkenness (Eph. 5:8–21)
- f. Idle gossip and busybodying (1 Tim. 5:11–15)
- g. Lies (John 8:44)
- h. Idolatry (1 John 5:18–21)

3. Extraordinary Demonic

- a. Torment (Acts 5:16)
- b. Physical injury (Matt. 9:32–33; 12:22–23; Acts 8:4–8)
- c. False miracles (Acts 8:9–23; 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:9–10)

- d. Accusation (Rev. 12:10)
- e. Vain regrets and condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- f. General guilt vs. specific conviction
- g. Second person (“you” language instead of “I”)
- h. Death, e.g., food, sex, drink, recklessness (Prov. 8:36)
- i. Murder/Suicide (John 8:44)
- j. False spirits (1 John 4:1–6)

4. **Names of Satan:**

- a. Abaddon (“destroyer”) (Rev 9:11)
- b. The god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4)
- c. Accuser (Rev. 12:10)
- d. Great Dragon (Rev. 12:9)
- e. Adversary (1 Pet. 5:8)
- f. Lawless One (2 Thess. 2:18)
- g. Apollyon (“destroyer”) (Rev. 9:11)
- h. Liar (John 8:44)
- i. Beelzebul (Matt. 12:24)
- j. Morning Star (Isa. 14:12)
- k. Belial (2 Cor. 6:15)
- l. Murderer (John 8:44)
- m. Deceiver (Rev. 12:9)
- n. Prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2)
- o. Devil (Luke 4:13)
- p. Ruler of this world (John 12:31)

- q. Enemy (Matt. 13:28, 39)
- r. Satan (Acts 26:18)
- s. Evil One (Matt. 13:28, 39)
- t. Serpent (Rev. 12:9)
- u. Father of lies (John 8:44)
- v. Tempter (1 Thess. 3:5)