

## The Battle

### *Prayer*

This morning I want to talk about the battles that Christians face in our society and what we can do about them.

Let me start with a story... I can't remember the exact date but around 2005 NBC's Dateline did a program on Satan and demonic activity. For this special they brought on an expert Christian who was either a ABD or Phd. In short, a very learned man... He had done interdisciplinary studies with Anthropologists and Psychologists on this topic. I think most Christians, even if they didn't agree with everything he said, could confidently say that he was a learned expert in his field. (Source - Jeff Bruce)

I can't think of a better way to approach the topic with a group of skeptical individuals than presenting well-reasoned bible based responses to the questions that would be asked.

Now when I was young my dad played in a band named: "The Canucks" This was a country music cover band. They were quite popular and very Good IMHO. Well in comes the new paper reporter to interview my dad about the band... He told them about their music, life on the road and all the stuff that a musician would experience in his field. When the article came out the headline read: "Former Canuck trades his Hockey stick for a Batton."

My dad still thinks it is hilarious and points to it as an example that you can't always believe what you read in the news. He told me that almost all of the report was fantasy in the mind of the reporter. He told me that he got a couple of things right... The Date and his name...

I find this interesting...

Anyway back to my NBC story.

Well as you can imagine the video was highly edited and was placed next to a story called: "The Snake Handlers". So... What we have is an article where a learned man is speaking about demons and his words are taken without context, placed right beside a video of a radical group of Christians who believe correctly that they have authority over Satan. But... they then take this to mean that they are immune to the poisonous effects of snakebites. So the video following is Christians rolling about and trying to stomp on snakes.

What message do you think that NBC provided their audience with about Christians?

As Christians do we:

- Know that there is a spiritual reality?
- Believe in God?
- Believe in Satan and evil spirits?
- Know that we are at war from the prince of lies?
- Know that Jesus has been granted all authority?

Many in the world believe that we are crazy. They may assert that in a modern world, science leaves very little room for a spiritual reality. We are thought of by some as: naïve, backward, superstitious and without intellectual capacity... Presentations like the one done on NBC's Dateline put Christians into this slot very neatly.

We lose credibility instead of effectively educating the masses... This problem is even endemic in certain "Christian" circles. One example is Hans Hubner a German biblical scholar who said: "A belief in the devil has lost its plausibility. Whoever today still feels threatened by the devil or believes in his fangs is probably himself in the fangs of a fanatical sect."

I guess I am then part of a fanatical sect, because I believe in these things. I place my belief in these things based on Scripture; which is very indicative of their existence. The bible says it and I believe it. Proceeding from that point of view, I can attest to the bible speaking of a malevolent being named Satan who wants to destroy God's people and actively seeks for ways to tempt, deceive and confuse. I can attest to the fact that there is a hell and it is a very real place.

Satan is no match for God and is defeated. His time is limited and he knows it. He is doing as much damage he can and so still presents a real and present danger to those who are not prepared.

The world in fact much of our north American culture may believe that we are simpletons or superstitious nut cases or whatever label they can come up with but... If we do not understand these things then as Christians much of our walk and what we experience on the journey does not make sense. The world does not see the battle. It is spiritual, yet it affects our daily lives. We as children of God are in a spiritual battle. The world may not understand it but scripture tells us that Satan and demons are in fact real!

Whether understood or not, those who do not take the spiritual world serious are actually being used by that malevolence to deceive the world into thinking the spiritual world is not what the Word of God says it is. We are taught that we are in a spiritual war with demonic forces and as Christians we are to be prepared and take up the good fight against these things.

In the book of Ephesians we see the apostle Paul telling us what Christ has done for us. We then see him describe how to live in Christ and in response to everything that he has done on our behalf. He then talks about how to live in our identity in Christ and with each other.

I love this book. It is one of my favorites from God's word. To zero in a bit, in Ephesians 6:10 we see the Armor of God. This also marks a shift in Paul's teaching from the physical realm to the spiritual realm.

Obviously we don't have time to treat all of what Ephesians has to offer us in this sermon, but there are a few things of which we should take note:

- Ephesians 1:20-21 – Christ has all authority over demonic forces and powers
- Ephesians 2:2 – Delivered from enslavement to the prince of the power of the air (Satan)
- Ephesians 4:27 – A clear warning not to give the enemy a place or foothold

Excerpt - "Ephesus was the magic capital of the ancient world. The Ephesians lived in a culture permeated by mystery religions, magic, animism, and demonic activity. People lived in continual fear of evil spirits. And to ward off the influence of such spirits, people employed all sorts of spells, and charms, and amulets, and incantations. As a good pastor, Paul wants to assure these young believers that Christ reigns supreme over demonic forces. At the same time, he makes clear that these powers remain active and dangerous, and thus believers must struggle against them. And in order to successfully engage in this struggle, Paul says, believers must be aware of two things; (1) the nature of the battle they are in, and the weapons they must employ to fight this battle. " (Jeff Bruce)

The ladies have had a chance to look at some of Ephesians 6 in depth with Julie, so for some of you this may be a bit of a review. Let's read Ephesians 6:11-13:

*"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

*Now the amplified version*

*Put on the full armor of God [for His precepts are like the splendid armor of a heavily-armed soldier], so that you may be able to [successfully] stand up against all the schemes and the strategies and the deceits of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) places. Therefore, put on the complete armor of God, so that you will be able to [successfully] resist and stand your ground in the evil day [of danger], and having done everything [that the crisis demands], to stand firm [in your place, fully prepared, immovable, victorious].*

This is followed by the actual armor...

Why do we need this Armor? Because: *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) places”*

*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup>and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Why does it say: “Stand therefore”?

Stand –

- Does it mean to literally stand up?
- Does it mean to take a stand for something?
- Does it mean to take a defensive position against something?

Yes... Paul tells us to take a stand against the schemes of the devil.

Stand up and not be complacent, be active

Stand up for what we believe, be faithful

Stand up against the evil, be vigilant

Taking a stand is also considered a military term, so by its very nature it is both defensive and offensive. We need to hold our ground and not give way to the enemy, but we are also called to take ground by advancing against him.

It may seem obvious but then why does Paul tell us to stand?

It is because we are in a spiritual battle. Not with flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places.

**Belt of truth** – A belt held the warriors tunic so that he could maneuver without getting tangled up in his clothing and it kept the sword ready and accessible to do battle. Keeps the breastplate in place

Now truth... John 8:44-45 says:

*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.*

Satan is a liar, he is the father of lies and uses these lies to deceive and trick us into falling for a trap or temptation. We come to know the truth that is Jesus and his divine word. Armour fits together.

Are we speaking the truth? Are we leading transparent and honest lives?

Truth builds trust and lies destroy it.

**Breastplate of Righteousness** – A breastplate protected the heart and vital organs of the body. We are covered in his righteousness

Do we put on the righteousness of Christ so that we are positionally righteous before God the Father. It is his righteousness that protects us from the accusations of the father of lies. He will never stop trying to use your sin or your mistakes to condemn you. He will accuse you and will try to make you feel unworthy because of your righteousness. This is why understanding what Christ has done for us is so important.

So we are protected by His righteousness and our trying to live a righteous life prevents a foothold.

## **Shoes of the Gospel**

This is a switch from the defensive to the offensive. We are told to spread the Good news of Jesus Christ. We push back the enemy through the preaching, teaching and applying of his holy word. "Go Therefore" God gives opportunities, we simply have to be obedient to his will

Shoes give a soldier a tremendous benefit. Can you imagine going into battle barefoot? I mean other than you ninjas out there...

No a small rock, a piece of glass, rough terrain etc. would inhibit your movement.

Know the word so that you are prepared to give and answer.

## **Shield of Faith**

Paul's experience would have been of the Romans and their shields. Roman Shields were large and a man could hide behind them. There were famous for their ability to enclose and prevent the damage that could be caused by archers. We want to withstand the darts of the enemy, we need our shield. Faith is vital. I mean it is both essential and it is life. Hear me on this...

It is the shield of faith that protects you from the fiery darts of the enemy. When you attacked during spiritual warfare, God becomes your shield because of your faith in him.

When do you need your shield in the "real world"?

- To overcome evil thoughts
- To overcome temptations
- To overcome physical diseases
- To overcome conflicts on the job
- To overcome insecurities
- To overcome past hurts
- And so on... While it is truth the shield takes care of you in the spiritual world, it is equally true that your faith in Jesus takes care of you in the natural world.

Men as flawed as any of us may think we are, were considered friends of God by God himself; Because of their faith in him. You see without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6)

Faith is vital!

## **Helmet of Salvation**

Satan our adversary wants to claim you. He wants to take you away from God. That's just the way he is. But Jesus now has a claim on your life as you have given it to him. Satan's end game is that he wants to destroy you. Jesus wants to save you so, when you became saved, all rights and privileges the Prince of the Air (Eph. 2:2) enjoyed in your life was broken away by the blood of Jesus. The adversary no longer has any claim on your life. In fact, When God saved you he raised you up with Christ and seated you with him in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 2:6)

Because of Christ and what he has done you now are in a position of authority over the evil one. Where so many Christians fall into problems is when they forget who they are in Christ and the authority he has given them. We have authority and power to cast him away from us.

### **Sword of the Spirit**

This quite literally is the word of God. We use God's word against the enemy. Lack of familiarity with his word, leaves many Christians unarmed and unprepared for the attacks of the enemy. Your faith will shield you, but to make inroads against territory taken by the enemy we all need God's word.

Look at the example Christ provided when he was tempted... Satan tempts Jesus and he responds with scripture. In fact, in many translations the words Jesus used were: "It is written"

God's word protects us against the schemes and deceptions of the enemy. It also instructs us in all righteousness.

### **Prayer**

"The seventh and final weapon Paul mentions is prayer. And this weapon deserves an extended discussion. Notice that Paul speaks of prayer differently than the other weapons. First, in discussing prayer, Paul shifts from the past tense to the present tense. This indicates that prayer is something we are to be doing continually. Second, notice that Paul drops the military imagery in verses 18-20. Prayer doesn't correspond to any piece of a soldier's equipment. Third, notice how many times Paul uses the word "all." He says we should pray at

all times in all sorts of ways for all the saints with all perseverance. Christians should continually offer up Spirit-inspired and Spirit-directed prayers for other Christians. Paul thinks that prayer is basic to spiritual warfare. In essence, putting on the armour of God

is a prayerful activity. Prayer is the means by which we appropriate the armour of God and fight the spiritual war. And this is where all of this gets very, very practical. A prayerless Christian is not fighting. If you aren't praying, you are on the sidelines, and you are particularly vulnerable to spiritual attack. This passage has huge implications for our own prayer lives " (Jeff Bruce)

### **Conclusion**

Do not allow yourself to become deceived or complacent. We are in a spiritual battle. Put on the Armor of God; which is honed in prayer.

*Prayer*