

We're in a battle

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[0 : 00] 1859 Charles Darwin wrote a book called the on the origin of species and it had a much longer title than that it's gone through many reprints a very significant book and I want to speak briefly about that this morning and also about this book which was published in 1976 Richard Dawkins prolific writer those two books I believe have been extremely important in Western Europe and the thinking of people the effects in Western Europe over the last 150 years have been that the scientific model is the default answer to every life issue by that I mean that everything that we face in our lives can somehow be explainable by something that can be measured that could be tested interestingly a quote from Richard Dawkins in the selfish gene chance is just a word expressing ignorance interesting people say well just just by chance something happened

Richard Dawkins would say you think it's chance now but it's only because we don't know enough the more we know the more we can understand the more the scientific model gets filled out we shall be able to properly understand everything that happens to us I'd like to suggest that in Western Europe and I've been careful with the words here because this isn't true in many parts of the world but in Western Europe this is the default way in which people think it almost comes with our mother's milk as we live in this country today that everything is explainable by science science that even the things that we don't yet understand will one day be understandable in that kind of way and that all we're lacking at the moment is just a little bit more research a little bit more scientific understanding but for us today here is the challenge because the beliefs and the practical behaviors of Christians have tended to adjust to suit the scientific the scientific model so we take our Bibles and we are inclined to trust what seems reasonable rather than what is revealed because that's the way we think in our lives is this reasonable is it explainable does it meet the scientific test we take the spiritual and we're inclined to trust what we can see and test and measure rather than what we can't we take the supernatural and we're inclined to trust what is explainable by human experience rather than what is not results of this in the Christian world are quite striking there has been diminished confidence in the Bible as a reliable source of information as a reliable source of information about God but who is God and about ourselves so that it appears that Christians these days read their Bibles a great deal less than they would have done 150 years ago not by coincidence at the same time as the origin of the species was published theology in Western Europe began to take a liberal turn especially in Germany the results of which the results of which was that there was a complete reevaluation of the Bible and in particular of the nature of miracles so that the theologians began to look at this book again and to say well if really we're living in a world that is only explainable on a scientific basis how do we tackle the issue of miracles?

what do we think about Jesus turning water into wine? have you ever seen that? what do you think of him putting mud on someone's eyes and them seeing? is that possible? is that reasonable? could he actually meet the funeral party outside the village of Nain and say to the young man that dead young man get up?

[6 : 13] have you ever seen a dead man come to life? they must have got it wrong perhaps perhaps a bit of sight before and he got a little bit after that perhaps that dead man wasn't dead at all he was just in some sort of a coma it was wine all the time inside the bottles and who is this Jesus?

can we really understand who this Jesus is from this record? or do we have to sort of get behind the words again? to understand what this real Jesus is about?

and so they thought and so they taught and so through the 1860s and the 1870s a whole generation of future Bible teachers and Bible pastors and ministers were produced from these Western theological colleges Bible colleges and they went into the churches and they began to

teach in that sort of a fashion so that their Bibles had to have scissors with them because there are certain parts of it you couldn't trust there are certain parts you had to explain in a culturally relevant manner and they would say well you can't trust the miracles but you can understand the morality of Jesus Christ you can understand how wonderful the Sermon on the Mount is now these things are very reasonable these are the things that we in our world never forget the miracles and by the way in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead but we'll have the morality so come to church you'll be taught morality so it was a great swathes of previous evangelical

Bible believing churches actually went down a route which became very liberal and embracing of a concept of Christianity which became more and more and more adrift from the Bible so if your minister doesn't believe the Bible why would you do so?

after all he's been to college he's read the books he knows he knows a crisis of Bible reading a crisis of Bible reading so should I be surprised to read in last month's evangelicals that a survey of Bible college students in the United States revealed that 80% of the Bible college students do not regularly read the Bible 80% no I'm not talking about ordinary laymen I'm talking about people who are studying to become Christian leaders 80% of them don't have a regular time of reading the Bible 80% of them are not opening the Bible in what we would call a quiet time don't you find that astonishing?

[10 : 25] isn't that sobering? so I'm not going to embarrass this congregation by asking you to put up your hand whether you have a regular reading of the Bible time but I let that statistic ring home and say to each one of us what is your Bible reading like?

are you so infected by the liberalism that came from the 19th century? are you so infected infected by the pervasiveness the media strong the everyday background noise of the scientific model that you find it even difficult!

let him who thinks he stand take you lest he fall let him who thinks he stand take you lest he fall I'm quite sure that there were plenty of people who at the beginning of the 19th century were absolutely confident in their in their Bibles who 30 or 40 years later turned to agnosticism or even atheism such was the power and the strength of the prevailing tide such was this overwhelming tsunami of the idea that everything is explainable by the Lord of Science reduced Bible reading selected Bible reading we are all guilty of that I'm sure especially when you're tired on a Monday morning it's quite hard to even think about opening up

I need some encouragement when I start my day I'm not sure I'm going to find that buried away in the book of Judges but I'm pretty confident I can find it in Psalm 34 or Psalm 23 or probably somewhere inside an epistle Selected Bible reading Selected Bible reading because there are some passages which are very challenging and they do attack the idea of the scientific model and then there is filtered Bible reading which is something we all go through where we read a passage and we just skip through certain things because they don't make sense or they don't feel naturally right for us and I asked David to read the whole of Ephesians 6 not because we're going to speak about the whole of Ephesians 6 but simply because the very thing that I'm talking about is kind of present when we face a passage like Ephesians 6

Ephesians 6 Ephesians 6 speaks firstly to children obey your parents in the law anybody got a problem with that? have anybody got a problem with that?

[13 : 46] no problem with that at all don't have a problem with that fathers don't exasperate your children extremely good psychology no problem with that at all then we go on to employees and employers wouldn't the world be a great place if there was that sort of relationship in the workplace between masters and servants actually masters and slaves in those days but if we had employers who actually recognise that they've got to give an account of themselves to God that might change their behaviour and attitude towards those who they employ as a Christian person I don't think we have a problem with saying we're going to work to serve the Lord and great it is at the end of this little letter here to hear about this dear brother Tychicus it's really down to earth stuff isn't it?

I'm sending him to you to so that you can know how I'm doing really good stuff what's what we like to do when we come on a Sunday morning here to church we like to know how you're doing how you're doing?

how you're doing? do you have a problem with that? you don't have any problem with that? it's all good stuff it's all very comfortable and encouraging the ABC of living life got a problem at work?

Ephesians 6 verse 5 got a problem with children? Ephesians 6 verses 1-4 that would probably help me so the Bible is a manual for us to live our lives by all that's quite true all that's quite helpful this is

all Bible truth this is all the word of God but the passage we're going to look at today and indeed the next two Sundays is actually Ephesians 6 verses 10-20 Ephesians 6 verses 10-20 now that is a lot more challenging that flies in the face all the very things that I've been talking about this morning and it seems to me that even here with our very good tradition of Bible teaching that we need the challenge of facing up to the passages in God's word that deal with the topics that are actually counter-cultural not to be mentioned in polite society not to be mentioned in polite society not the sort of thing that could be easily said over the garden fence when you're trying to borrow the lawnmower off your neighbour let's have a chat about Ephesians 6 10-20 and yet if these are silent passages in our Bibles we're doing no other than actually taking our scissors out and doing exactly what people used to do in the 19th century and we may have Bibles which complete in terms of their pages and their words but in practice we're filtering it we're filtering it not a bad test of true Christianity to say true Christianity consists in a fundamental belief in the truth of every word of the Bible as given in its original languages not a bad test of Christianity to say it is about the spiritual as well as about the earthly not a bad test of Christianity to say it's about things that are not explainable in natural terms it's about the supernatural as well as the natural and it's a challenge for all of us today what is your attitude to this Bible?

what is your attitude to the spiritual? what is your attitude to the supernatural? these are the very topics that Ephesians 6 10-20 tackles we've already had it read but let me just read a selection or a section of it again so you might understand what I'm trying to come from I want you to picture the situation this is Ephesus and Paul is remembering the congregation that he spent at least two years with a congregation that has indeed wives and husbands Ephesians chapter 5 masters and servants they're sitting in the congregation so he tells them how they should behave and he's remembering what it was like to stand at the front of that little group of people now he's writing a letter but he's putting himself into that sort of preaching position he's saying things as if he was a preacher teaching this particular congregation children haven't gone out they're still here so he gets to this point in the end of verse 9 he says ok let's just have a pause

[20 : 03] I want most of you to leave the room now I've just got a special message a special message for a particular group of people it doesn't say that they're all still there all of them are still there the children they're all still there and Paul is saying to them finally finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you've done everything their children are three or four years old in this congregation that's a bit frightening it's frightening for them to hear that it's good for them to hear that whatever your age whatever your circumstances situation you need to hear the word of God in Ephesians 6 because if we do not take on board the challenges of this passage and many others like it we will be extremely vulnerable extremely vulnerable in this world we will be easy pickings we will be the next candidate for unbelief for loss of faith we will be the people who used to sit here but don't sit here any longer we will be people who started out well but eventually fall by the wayside firstly we're in a battle the Bible is full of the language of warfare think if you will of the whole of the Old Testament how many battles were fought in the Old Testament times

I haven't done that study but there's plenty aren't there how much blood was spilt how many armies went to the field of battle how often Israel was involved with conflict conflict, conflict, conflict, conflict war after war after war why do you think it's all there?

what's the point of it? well it really happened but aside from that the point of it is surely this that it tells us a picture that the people of God are involved in a place of constant warfare constant battle that what happened there with physical swords and spears and shields is happening to every person who is a child of God now but in a spiritual realm the Bible is full of the language of warfare it affects every Christian in every age this is not about how people thought in medieval times when they were a bit more open and up for the idea of battles don't be deceived just because the language here talks about a person who is definitely a Roman soldier 2,000 years ago this is the language of today and it affects every Christian in every age we're in a battle and whilst the battle may ebb and flow if you're a Christian you are definitely going to be in a battle and I'll give you a very good reason why that is the case it's because you've changed sides you've changed sides you were serving the devil once and now you're serving the Lord Jesus Christ you have been delivered

from the kingdom the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light that's exactly what the Bible tells about what your situation is you are not a bystander you are now in the army of the Lord you are a paid up follower of Jesus Christ and you're in the front line it's lifelong so 2 Timothy 4 verse 7

Paul writes looking back at the end of his life maybe 60 years old he says I have fought the good fight I have finished the race I have fought the good fight he's anticipating his deathbed he's anticipating the very end I know as I look back on my life it wasn't just when I was 20 it wasn't just the youthful lusts no, every part of his life there had been trouble and turmoil and difficulty and struggle and so it is for us and please younger people don't think that you come into a place of rest when you get to the age of 40 or 50 or 60 as if there are no battles to be fought there are different battles there are different challenges to be faced but you signed up for a lifetime of conflict it affects every aspect of our lives and how interesting that Paul puts this point at the very end of this letter when he's spoken about wives and husbands and their relationship with each other when he's spoken about the children and relationship to their parents when he's spoken about masters and slaves and the workplace well it's covering a lot of life isn't it he's touching a lot of life here and it's he's looking back on all that and he's saying finally you be strong in the Lord in all those areas you've got to be strong in the Lord in all those areas!

and there'll be casualties we will get hurt 2 Corinthians 4, 8 to 11 is the passage when Paul well let's turn to it because it's good for us to turn to our Bibles so page 1160 if you want to do that fast 2 Corinthians 4 verses 8 to 11 well what sort of a life is it for you Paul?

[27 : 19] tell me about what it's like to be an apostle we are hard pressed on every side but not crushed perplexed I thought everything was plain I thought he was so strong and clear no he knew what it was to be perplexed persecuted but not abandoned struck down but not destroyed we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body for we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus sake so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body the sentence of death he says in another place was upon us he woke up every morning what's it going to be like?

it's going to be a death day it's going to be a death day it's going to be a death day it's going to be a struggle I'm going to take up my cross there's a battle to be fought and we get hurt we get hurt and Paul himself refers to his thorn in the flesh God was in that but he was also a messenger of Satan it was also a messenger of Satan troubled him caused him discomfort we're in a battle I think I made the point plain the language of scripture is very plain this is not an isolated view of things this is mainstream Christian experience it's mainstream Christian experience but it's not where the 21st century UK Brighton resident wants to be do I have a problem?

I go and see a doctor do I have a problem in my mind? I need a psychiatrist everything can be solved somehow or other everything can be solved and Paul is saying to these people you mustn't take that view life is much, much bigger than that it's not to be boiled down to questions of tablets and courses and treatments there's something far more profound and amazing going on in this world and you are a part of it so my second point is know your enemy what is your enemy?

well here are the possible enemies there could be our circumstances Paul speaks of his thorn in the flesh that's that reference there you may be going through a particularly difficult circumstance and you might feel this is the key to my happiness and success in life change my circumstances my circumstances are the enemy I don't like my job I've got problems with my children I can't pay the mortgage if only those things were sorted I would be a much better person and the Bible says that's wrong that's not the answer please don't buy that message please don't buy that message that's the world's message it's not the message of the Bible because the world is a dark and desperate place to live in Ephesians, same book, chapter 2 verse 2 chapter 2 verse 2 you used to live when you followed the ways of the world the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who's now at work in a certain way the ways of the world the world has a way of doing things you think I'm not

I don't have to follow everybody else I tell you there's a lot of messages out there that cause you to follow everyone else the world is a problem place to be the Christian people in the past used to think perhaps the best way of doing it is to get out of the world altogether go and sit on a very tall pole go and live in a monastery go to a desert island they didn't escape problems but they saw that the world was a desperate place to be other people they're a major problem in our lives and Ephesians 5 and 6 has a lot to say about the problems of other people how do wives get on with husbands?

[31 : 50] how do children get on with parents? how do I manage at work? and then there's ourselves if you know anything about yourself there are times when you'll be despairing of yourself Paul says you know when I want to do good evil is there present with me I know what it is to fall and fail I'm so glad that my heart is not open so that you can see it I'm so glad that you can't read the thoughts in my mind because I know what's in my heart you know what's in yours even if I could sort all these other things out I'd be left with myself hmm those are possible enemies they're real enemies but they're not the enemy of Ephesians 6 10 our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the powers of this dark world against the spiritual forces of evil let me say straight away

I'm absolutely sure the earthly rulers the earthly authorities this is spiritual territory and he's just saying don't get this wrong don't fight the wrong enemy realize that the biggest enemy the greatest danger the most complex warfare is not against circumstances other people even ourselves but it's against this which is personified in the person of the devil or Satan who is the adversary God's adversary and our adversary as well because we're on God's side we're God's people we belong to him therefore we are the prime targets for the devil and this is our real enemy so

I take you through some quick examples of the way Paul thinks about his life well we start with actually one from Peter it's just on the screen so Peter says there's suffering in the world he writes to people who are suffering probably it was pretty acute suffering they lost some people that even died be self controlled and alert your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour because you know your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings did they see the devil?

they didn't see the devil they saw the mocking people around them they saw the lies and the innuendo and so forth but Peter says actually behind all that Bible thinking too it's a church situation someone has behaved really outrageously badly what do they do about that situation?

how do they handle it? it's a pastoral problem put it over to the pastor he'll handle it, he'll sort it so Paul says in this situation in this situation and he wrestled with it in 1 Corinthians he's coming back to it in the second letter here you've come to a point where you need to apply forgiveness if you're forgiving him really important you do this really important not just for his psychological well being Satan may outwit us Satan will have got a victory our front line we push back and he goes on to say we are not unaware of his schemes you know the double negative?

[36 : 16] we are totally aware of the way he behaves we totally understand the way he works in churches the way he upsets the way he causes people to bicker and talk behind each other's backs and so forth we're totally aware of that we're not going to be taken in by it we're not going to fight with the weapons of this world we're going to recognise fairly and squarely the devils in this anybody here ever lost their temper?

thank you any angry? any angry? any angry? any angry? any angry? any angry? any angry? any angry?

any angry? any angry? any angry? Anybody here ever lost their temper? Thank you. One hand went up.

35 other hands would have gone up. In your anger, do not sin. Have you ever been angry? Do let the sun go down while you're still angry.

And, oh, by the way, do not give the devil a foothold. Everybody loses their temper. Common stuff. It happens. You hear people shouting off.

[37 : 37] Paul says, do you realize if you go to bed at night and you haven't dealt with your anger, you've given the devil a foothold in your life and in your relationships.

He's got a foothold. He's got a grip. Bible thinking for every day.

As we've said, all that catalog of relationships. This is what Paul says to them. He says to them, be strong in the Lord because behind all these relationships, the devil's trying to get in.

Now, I want you to notice, and I'm not trying to be extreme here because I know that many people almost get paranoid in this area.

But the way that Paul and Peter and the other apostles deals with it is they say, this has got to be dealt with. If you're angry, just get over it. Say your sorries.

[38 : 37] Go to bed. Go to sleep. And, P.S., remember, the devil's here at work. So you don't want to give him a chance. I'm not talking about exorcism.

I'm not talking about sort of horror stuff and so forth. I'm just talking about the everyday, the mundane of life. Because the devil is at work. We rejoice in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is with us this morning.

But, brothers and sisters, I have to tell you, the devil's here as well. He's whispering things in your ears. He's saying things to you.

He doesn't stand and wait at the door. He's here as well. He'll be there at the church lunch. You do need to know that.

Not to be paranoid. But just to be straightforward. To be clear in your mind. And to recognize the reality of what's happening. What's going on.

[39 : 50] Tragedy. If we spend the whole of our lives fighting the wrong enemies. Absolute tragedy. Because the word of God gives us a very, very clear statement. Of who we should be really fighting.

And what is at stake. So I end with this thought. For this week. Because. You know.

When you toss it up. And you think. Well I could maybe deal with circumstances. And I know how to get around my boss. And you know. I can do things for my children. But the devil.

He's powerful. He's unseen. He's been around a long time. He's done amazing damage. He's done amazing damage in this world. Who am I. To fight against this enemy.

When he has the audacity to come to Jesus Christ. And tempt him. In the way that he did. Face to face. Who am I. To take a stand against this enemy.

[40 : 56] And Paul says. You're the person. You're the one to do it. That's what you're called to do. Do you know something else?

Victory. Is sure. Victory. Is sure. Because of the armor. God supplies. And we'll be thinking about that next week. Therefore put on the full armor of God.

So that when the day of evil comes. And I think that means. When the day of a special. Temptation and difficulty. Comes your way. And it will. You may be able to stand your ground.

And after you've done everything. To stand. No. Not moving back. Not retreating. Standing. Standing.

That's victory. That's security. And secondly. Because the battle is God's battle. The battle is God's battle.

[41 : 55] In the end. It's not down to you. God's honor is at stake. God's honor is at stake. And we'll be thinking about that. In future days as well.

You're in God's army. And God is never defeated. The whole of this Bible. From beginning to end. Tells of this mighty.

Titanic struggle. At the very beginning in the garden. There's the serpent. Whispering. Doing exactly what he's done.

Throughout all the ages since. At the very end. Oh there's still the serpent. The dragon. That he's defeated.

He knows his time is short. We know the end result. We know what's going to happen. There's going to be a grand and glorious victory. And it's going to be manifest.

[42 : 52] To all the world. Because Jesus is King of Kings. And Lord of Lords. Every knee to him will bow. Be strong in the Lord.

And in his mighty power. We're on his side. What a comfort and encouragement that is to know. You feel weak. You feel a failure. You feel you've done wrong in your life. You feel even this morning.

I've sinned in so many ways. But. You have the mark of Jesus Christ upon you. Jesus has died upon the cross for you. And he says.

No one will snatch them from my hand. You won't be taken away. God will look after you. God will keep you. That's his promise.

And that's his intention. So there was another battle a long time ago. And the king was frightened. And the armies against him were vast.

[43 : 49] But this is what was said to King Jehoshaphat. Listen. This is what the Lord says to you. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours.

But God's. The battle is not yours. But God's. What an enormous encouragement.

Brothers and sisters. As we go into our weeks. Whatever they are. Whatever the circumstances.

Whatever the difficulties that we face. The battle is not yours. But God's. Yes there's fighting to be done.

But God is the one. Who will get himself the victory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. We close with.
Thank you.