

Spiritual Warfare - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Shuffling going on here as we get squared out. I have some stuff here that I need today.

Just put this on.

There you go. Let's get you kicked out here a little bit. They go in, but well, forget that. There's too much detail. Isaac, come.

Come. Come. I think the helmet will fit you, I'm pretty sure.

Just get this helmet on here, would you please? I know, there'll be a word from the back. Do this, do that. You know, it's like. There we go.

[1 : 11] Go stand over there by Isaiah. Yeah. Well, when Greg Bernard also has material like this, a little bit, it's for Riot gear.

And Seth Kirtland. Okay, guys. Hey, pretty good looking, aren't they? Huh? You can go back down now.

No, Isaiah, you stay up here. I need, no. I'm teasing. I asked Greg Bernard and Seth Kirtland and Sam to give me a little bit of insight into the materials they wear when they are, they're either firefighting or involved in what they do professionally.

And I can tell you that none of them wear the protective gear that is part of their requirement for their job, except when it's needed.

You know, I, Greg, you have yours in the car. Is that when you go out that's there or it's tucked away somewhere? And do you ever put it on to come down for breakfast? I know. Sam, do you ever use yours to mow the lawn?

[2 : 43] Anything like that? You know, it's like, I know you live in a tough neighborhood. No, I... And where's Kathy? I don't know if things can be fiery there, but, you know, Seth does not come down with his kit on without a reason.

Okay? I want us to think very, very carefully about how seriously we take the environment we live in.

And I would be remiss to not preface our lesson with prayer. Am I right? So let's pray.

Father, we call upon your name. And in doing so, we confess our frailty and our inadequacy, and we confess your sufficiency.

We also come with confidence because of the finished work of Christ and because of the absolute certainty we have that you love us and that you're interested in us and you want us to understand your word and you want us to apply it.

[3 : 57] At the very outset, we recognize that the purpose of preaching is really not to entertain, but to bring to us the sweet and wonderful words of your wisdom that we might be thoroughly fit and furnished to live godly lives, to honor Christ, and to make glory to the cross.

And so we want your spirit to help us, and we want to change and grow as a result of attention to your word this morning. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. I want you to turn your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6, and I want you to look there at verse 11. It says this, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

And as I started out this morning, what I did was I just took a little bit of the battle gear that Sam has and put it on a couple kids, and you can see it, A, it doesn't fit well, but B, it's something that's cumbersome and bulky, and it is not something that anybody wears when they're out for a casual little spin.

It's only worn when it's necessary. And the truth of the matter is, is that when Paul makes this statement, and he says, Finally, brethren, okay, he says, Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might, he is not making this statement finally like some professor does, when at the end of the class he says, Oh, finally, there will be no quiz tomorrow.

[5 : 38] You know, it's a little detail as you close off. And as the professor is speaking, he is doing what with his notebook? He's closing it up, and you're packing things up and sliding it into your ruck, and you're kind of thinking, Well, I'm out of here.

That's not what Paul intends for us to do. He intends for us to listen very carefully because what he is saying now and carrying forward is profoundly significant to us.

You see, while it is true that Ephesians has laid out for us just a broad scope of incredibly true doctrinal principles, in fact, Paul actually takes the time to cover 27 different doctrinal issues in the book of Ephesians.

It's kind of a mini-survey of Bible teaching. He's worked his way through the issue of our salvation and how we, by grace, saved.

He's explained the fact that we also are drawn together and put into a body of believers for the sake of our well-being and for the sake of his testimony.

[6 : 46] He's explained to us the importance of living according to the power of the Spirit of God.

And now he comes to this last little bit and he says, Listen, finally, brethren, be strong, be strong, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

And as I think about this this morning, I have to confess that I venture to think, to guess, that for the most part, we do not live as conscientiously and as sensitively to the conflict and the danger that we face.

Let's do a little threat assessment. What I mean by that is let's take a little private quiz to figure out how on point you are, how focused, how intentional you are on your own spiritual survivability.

Here we go. Questions. You can kind of check them off in your own mind. First of all, do you have meaningful devotions on a daily basis? Hey, guys, I am not talking about the daily bread.

You got that? Do you have devotions on a daily basis? I'll never forget talking some time ago with a pastor whose truth of the matter is the wheels were coming off.

[8 : 07] And one of the early things that goes with counseling is trying to assess where is this person? What's happening in their life?

And I ask the question, so what do you do for daily devotions? And you know how I feel about the daily bread. Has anybody figured out how I feel about the daily bread? Is that a secret? Does anybody know?

Okay. And he says to me, well, I use the daily bread. It was all I could do. Just, mm-hmm, yeah.

Good. And I said, well, okay.

I thought I'd better ask another question so I didn't choke on my tongue. I said, so tell me about your prayer life. There was a long pause. And he thought, well, I probably ought to throw some kind of answer out there.

He says, well, I pray the Lord's Prayer. Now, hey, I'm all about the Lord's Prayer. And I think the Lord's Prayer is important, and I think the Lord's Prayer, the one you're thinking of, John 17, right?

[9 : 02] That's what you were thinking. The Lord's Prayer, the one we commonly refer to, is actually the example prayer where Jesus said, hey, let me give you an outline to kind of give you the broad flow.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. And when I have a man say to me who is in pastoral ministry, I use the daily bread, and I do recite the Lord's Prayer.

You know what I'm thinking? You know what I'm thinking? I'm thinking I understand why this man is toast. So, do you have a meaningful devotions on a daily basis?

Do you? Do you regularly pray for protection from temptation? That's the second question that I want you to think about this morning. Jesus, when he taught his disciples to pray, he said, lead us, what?

Not into temptation. By the way, is it more important to pray about not being led into temptation than having daily bread? What do you think?

[10 : 02] Huh? Huh? The things we pray about are reflective of the things we think that are important. Am I right or wrong? A couple days ago, anybody who knows me knows that I am a very conscientious and deliberate and careful driver that...

Now, this is the truth. In the space of about two days, I had almost three accidents. You know, I was like, people are trying to hit me.

I want you to know that. And I have to tell you that following that, the last couple days when I get into the car, I'm praying, Lord, protect me and help other people not to get hurt by me.

You know, I pray because I need help. Do you follow that? So, do you pray on a regular basis, lead me not into temptation? Jesus, when he was teaching his disciples, he says, listen, pray that you don't enter into temptation.

Third, hey, do you recognize that Satan is out to ruin your life and he knows your weak spots? Huh? [11:15] It says in the scriptures that we have an adversary. We are not to be ignorant of his devices.

If you're sitting here and you are not aware of the adversary and the fact that he knows, he has a strategy for you, you're missing it.

A fourth one. Do you see the body of Christ as an essential part of your spiritual defense plan? Do you actually see the body of Christ as an essential part of your spiritual defense plan?

Can I tell you something about church? You know, I wish church were filled with perfect people. At least on this side of glory, it would be so much easier. But I'm here.

And starting with me, there's problems. But you know what? I need other people in the family of God to help me in this journey and not to be overwhelmed by the enemy.

[12:16] It says in Hebrews chapter 3, it says, listen, talks about the fact that the deceitfulness of sin can creep in and lead us astray from the living God.

And so we have to exhort one another. We need each other. And your sensitivity to the priority of the bride of Christ is directly proportionate to many theological things, including your sense of spiritual vulnerability.

And I have to tell you, as I think over my life and pastoral ministry, I have to say that I see far too many people that are almost brain dead when it comes to the matter of spiritual conflict.

I want you to look at this passage, and kind of as an overarching thing, I want you to understand that, first of all, we are at war. We are at war. Ephesians has opened our heart up to this broad flow of theology that explains to us the matter of the calling of God in salvation and the blessing of being part of His family and the power of the Spirit of God in our lives.

And we have been encouraged to understand that we don't have to stay the way we used to be. Listen to me. I love what Andrew said about conversion.

[13:39] You know what? Hey, listen to me. There is a before and after in the real work of God. Would you agree with that? Let me say it again slowly because I think there are far too many people rattling around telling me that they know Jesus, and there is no evidence of transforming power in their life.

If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a what? He is a new creation. He is something different, and we ought to be able to see that. Paul has walked us through these things, and now as he comes towards the end, he says, listen, before I turn you loose and go out into the world that you live in, I want you to understand there is a battle going on.

Now, it is interesting. When I was thinking and praying about this, I recognized there are actually two battles going on. In Tim's life, I've got this problem with indwelling sin.

Does anybody else have the problem with indwelling sin? Okay. I just wanted to be sure we were friends here. But, you know, I'm dealing with indwelling sin, and this passage is primarily not about indwelling sin.

That's in another text. This is about a different thing, and Paul wants us to understand that there is a conflict going on. Now, the spiritual vocabulary that we're going to cover here in Ephesians 6, verse 10 through 20, is loaded with implications about just how dangerous the world is that we live in.

[15:03] Let me kind of fast forward a little bit, and we're not going to deal with all this today, but I want you to look at verse 12. It says, How many of you have been really tweaked out with somebody else in the family of God?

You ever been just, I mean, you're at the point of spitting because you're so irritated with them. Come on. I mean, these are saints who have let you down, have hurt you, have disappointed you, have had little hissy fits, and you think that lightning at least ought to do something for them. You follow that? And it's not happening. Well, you know, here is Paul saying, you know, it's not about that person.

It says, we're not wrestling against flesh and blood. Oh, yeah, I am. You know, people I work with, you know. No, no, no. We're against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.

This world's a mess. And Satan wants to absolutely destroy your life. He has no other goal than to dishonor the testimony and the power of Christ and bring shame upon his name, and you happen to be the one with the bullseye painted on your back, and he's interested in destroying you.

[16:29] Salvation brings great blessing. That's true. But salvation also draws us into conflict.

And we ought to wake up and know that. Salvation brings great blessing. One of the things that ought to constantly affect our living is we remember the before and after.

But salvation also brings us into great conflict. Let me reference a couple different places where that's true, and I want you to turn in your Bible just for a moment to see it.

In Matthew chapter 10, verse 21, and then go back to 35, if you will. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus is speaking about his ministry in people's lives.

And here's what it says in verse 21. It says, Hey, brother will deliver brother over to death, and father his child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. And 35, For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against his mother, and a daughter-in-law against his mother-in-law.

[17:42] I remember years ago sharing the gospel with a guy named Mike Eusena. He worked with me. And the truth of the matter is, is I didn't thump him between the eyes with a Bible.

What I did was I just kind of lived a life for the Lord Jesus Christ, and it didn't take him very long to notice that, number one, I didn't swear and curse like everybody else did around me.

And secondly, I just didn't get kind of caught up in the filthy, perverted vocabulary and jokes that were part of the culture that we were in. And just out of curiosity, he asked me, So what's the deal? And I didn't tell him that I was a vegan. I told him I was a Christian. I was like, A Christian? Well, I'm one of those, you know. Really? Wow, that's encouraging.

And I found out Mike actually came from a Catholic background, and his faith was really something that was practiced. Well, I like a good Friday. We're going to have a good Friday service on this Friday, right?

[18:41] And by the way, everybody pay attention to this. We're going to have Dr. Brown, the new president of Cedarville, is going to... Dr. White. I said brown. It's white.

Change the color. I hope he's there a long time after I'm gone. And just stick with the white. Dr. Tom White. And I got to tell you, I have heard him, and he is an unbelievable godly man.

I think you're going to be blessed. But, you know, some people show up for church when? Good Friday? Sunday? By the way, I want you to know I'll be preaching the gospel on Sunday, just in case you're wondering what I'm going to be doing. Hammer, hammer, hammer.

It's all about Jesus, right? Okay. Here's Jesus. He says, listen, you come to me, you're going to have conflict. It's going to be tough.

I remember Mike Ucina coming to Christ. And I said, you know, Mike, why don't you tell your family about the wonderful thing Christ has done? He brought his dad in and his mom in and actually got his family together.

[19:38] And they were a big, large Catholic family. Had a whole bunch in the room. And he says, you're not going to believe this, but I have found complete forgiveness in Jesus. He died on the cross for my sins, and I've trusted him.

And it's wonderful. His dad started crying. His dad started crying. And his dad said, you don't understand.

Our family has been Catholic for over 400 years. How can you say that? You were baptized as an infant. When we come to Christ, there's conflict.

In Matthew chapter 16, verse 18, Jesus uses a very dramatic little phrase. He says, listen, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Do you know what that implies? There's going to be a little bit of conflict. And you walk out into the world in which we live, whether it is in the workplace or whether it is where you go to school, whether it is in your neighborhood.

[20:49] At the end of the day, you can kind of just keep your mouth shut. You kind of never say anything about what's really going on. But the minute you let people know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and that there is no hope apart from Christ, guess what happens?

There's conflict. And Paul says here, he says, hey, listen, you need to understand that there's a battle. Over in 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 8, and I'll just recite the text to you, it says that Satan goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may what?

Devour. One of the advantages of being a pastor here for 27 years is I know, I was thinking about this actually as I was driving here and praying this morning.

I thought, you know, one of the things that characterizes ministry is being one who has discovered the joy of grace and the power of the cross for one thing.

Do you follow that? You can speak intelligently and say, I know what it is to be delivered from the curse. I know what it is to be delivered from the horrible stain of sin. I have redemption and I have forgiveness.

[22 : 03] And when I preach about those things, I'm talking about things I know. I'm not talking about something in a book alone. And I know God's people affected by the enemy.

And so as a shepherd, it does kind of bother me sometimes when I see God's people not paying attention to the battle that we're in. The Bible is very, very clear about the conflict.

And yet, I bump into a lot of believers that really just aren't aware of how dangerous the times are. Let me give you a couple illustrations just to make my point. Honestly, the daily devotional life of many believers is rather anemic at best or non-existent.

Do you follow that? The covetousness. Do you know what covetousness is? Everybody smile.

It's believing that you'd be happier with something else than what you have already. If I just had, fill in the blank.

[23 : 22] In fact, until I have it, you know, I think about that Psalm, you know, Psalm 73. Who do I have in heaven but you? Well, but I would also like an iPad.

And you know, that car I have, it's, in fact, it needs its tires changed. It's time to choose what I'm going to do here.

So, covetousness has become an accepted religious practice. I was thinking about this. Dangerous thing to do. But, you know, we all kind of diss the health and wealth gospel.

Do you know what I'm talking about? I mean, hey, listen to me. Joel Osteen is not God's chosen. In case you're wondering, he does not preach clear, simple, godly gospel. Oh, we can pick at him, but we practice much of the same lifestyle.

Third, the entertainment and Internet activities of many professing believers is unbelievably alarming.

[24 : 27] Huh? I'm probably going too close here, but let's try one or two more just to see if I'm close.

The parental indifference to immodesty and purity is shameful. I know we're coming up on spring. Do you follow that? Now, let me explain something, just so you understand.

I don't, my socks are pulling down, but, you know, if I was constantly tugging on my trousers to pull them down, what would you think? I need more fabric somewhere.

I mean, do you follow what I'm saying? Am I right? Everybody, how many of you understand what I'm talking about here? You know, this is a little cryptic, but I want to help you get this picture. You know, if I'm, it means I need a little more fabric.

You follow that? So when I'm watching girls do this business, you know, it's like, there's a way to solve that. Wear a towel. I know, I know.

[25 : 32] Or doing this thing. Do you follow what I'm saying? If you're embarrassed when the pastor comes around and you think you ought to be doing this, there's a way to solve it. Go to your husband, if you're married, and say, what do you think, hon?

And if he says, well, you probably ought not to leave the house. You can say to him, for your eyes only, honey, but after that, I get the message.

Do you follow? Everybody understands what I'm saying. Do you follow me? Now, listen, there's a battle going on. The moral choices that many Christian singles make is pagan.

And I have to tell you that more and more churches are accommodating the culture today, whether it is dealing with abortion or homosexuality or the contemporary behaviors that everybody else is doing it, picking their nose and chewing it.

And we all practice the same thing. You know, it's like, well, everybody else is doing it. You know, really? Really? There's a battle going on. There's a battle going on.

[26 : 52] Well, let's deal with another little thing. Well, did I look at the time? I got another point, and I'm in trouble. Second. That's like, finally.

Okay. Attitude before armor. Attitude before armor. As we take up our text, I don't want you to miss how Paul starts.

We're commanded to be strong in the Lord before we're commanded to suit up. I've heard extended sermons on this passage, and they generally fall into one of two groups.

Some have made much of spiritual warfare and demonic powers, and, you know, it's kind of like Frank Peretti on steroids.

I know this is a very age-specific thing. Some of you younger ones are sitting here. Is that in Kindle? I don't know. This was in a previous life that people actually read Frank Peretti, and, you know, very popular.

[28 : 04] And so, you know, some people kind of go off on the spiritual warfare. You know, I was like, ooh. Ooh, I remember a lady called me a couple months ago, said, I need a pastor over here because somebody said I have demons in every one of the rooms of my house.

Yeah, Pastor Saul's laughing at me here. Those are the calls I love. Really? You've got to be kidding me. Get out of the house now.

No, I didn't say that. But, you know. Okay. On one side, you have that, ooh, there's a demon under every bush. And on the other side, everybody's all about the armor.

You know, I want to talk about Roman military and Roman sword and Roman shield and Roman this and Roman that. I've got to tell you something. That's not where this is really going. Here are the points.

We're responsible. That's where we start. The fact that the statement, be strong, is in the imperative makes it clear that the believer has a part to play in this conflict.

[29 : 13] We must be conscious and deliberate in choosing to focus on the battle that we're engaged in. You've got to choose to be strong. That's the reason at the very beginning I said let's take a little bit of threat assessment and double check and see where you are in your prayer life and in your personal walk and in your relationship with the body of Christ.

Because if you don't think there is a conflict going on, those all become secondary in importance and you're not engaged. Paul says, hey, you, you're responsible.

Second thing is it says here that his strength is to be relied upon. Look at what it says there in verse 10. It says, be strong. What? In the Lord.

In the Lord. How many of you have already figured out that you just can't pull it by yourself? Wave at me if you're in that pile. I cannot do it by myself.

Let me hammer on just a couple passages in relationship to that and close. John chapter 16 verse 33.

[30 : 21] Jesus said this. He said, let me tell you something. He says, be of good cheer for I have overcome the world. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6.

I want you to look at that passage. If you're there in Ephesians, you don't have far to turn. But in verse 6 it says, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will, what?

He's sure hoping you pull it off. No. What's he say? He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

Now we go also to Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 and 13. And I would encourage you to mark these down and have them memorized in your own spiritual life. It says this.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. I had somebody say to me, hey, how does this bit of human responsibility and God's divine power work together? Here's the truth.

[31 : 19] I don't know. But I know it's there. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You better have devotions, Tim, or you're toast. But then we have the other verse in 13 that says, for God works in you both to will and do his good pleasure.

Now here's my closer, and I love this verse. You can just, we're in Philippians, keep going.

Colossians chapter 1 verse 29. For this I toil, struggling with, what's the next word?

All his energy that he powerfully works within me. I love that verse. How do I know God's at work in me?

I see progress. Is it as quick as I would like? I remember saying with somebody else, I don't know why it took me to 65 to figure out that particular point.

I would have much rather learned it at 64. But you know what? Here's Paul saying, I know God is working because I continue moving towards glory.

[32 : 34] So let me summarize. I want you to think personally. First of all, which side are you on? Hmm? Truth of the matter is, is the Bible always puts things in black and white, yes or no.

You are either here today and you know Christ as your personal Savior, and you are one of his children, and the adversary hates you and he's interested in destroying you.

Or you are sitting here this morning with a burden of guilt and shame. You have never come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Your life has not been transformed by the gospel, and all the turmoil and mess that you have is God working to push you towards that place of, man, I need something.

Yes, you need Jesus. And if you're here today and you do not know Christ, let me tell you, my plea would be this, that you do not walk out of here thinking, well, I learned a Juana versus, doesn't that count?

Or I happen to have been baptized in Maranatha Baptist tank right back here about 35,000 years ago. You know, hey, what I'm interested in is whether you really know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

[33 : 46] And you don't have to come to the front to take care of that. Right where you sit, you can say, I am a sinner who stands justly condemned before a holy God, and I have no hope in my own work. I need Jesus to save me, and he died for my sins, and I trust what he's done.

It is only pride and arrogance that keeps a person who has been broken by the reality of their sin from calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus and saying, save me. Second question is this, do you believe him when he says you're at war?

Hmm? Listen, if you tell me you believe him when he says we're at war, then what I have to assume is that your devotional life, your prayer life, your affection and relationship with the body of Christ, and the things I ask, they're there, right?

Do you need to humble yourself? That's a practical question. Do you need to humble yourself and take him seriously? By the way, you don't have to come down front to do that. Do you know what you have to do? You have to say, I'm going to take you seriously, God.

We're at war. And frankly, I've been a casualty, and I've not been paying attention, and I need you to help me. I'm going to ask John to come as we sing, and I'm going to ask the candidate for baptism to come as we celebrate faith together.