

# SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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Date: 04 June 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ] War broke out in Europe in 1914. And while the war was raging in Europe, the United States maintained a policy of neutrality.

Life pretty much went on as normal for people in the US. The general population knew that there was a war going on. The Great War was going on over in Europe, but they pretty much wanted to stay out of it, and it did not impact their life day by day.

In fact, that was the vast majority of people were polled, to say the vast majority of the population wanted nothing to do with this war in Europe. President Woodrow Wilson, his efforts to maintain neutrality in World War I were disregarded by German submarines.

On the 3rd of February 1917, the USS Housatonic was sunk by German subs. It was a United States cruiser ship. And three more US ships were torpedoed in the following weeks.

And so Wilson's trying to do some negotiations with Germany. Give it a slap on the wrist and please don't do that again. And it got harder and harder as the death toll of American citizens continued to climb.

[ 1 : 17 ] What tipped the balance for the United States was when British intelligence intercepted a telegram from Arthur Zimmerman. He was the German Secretary of State attempting to come up with an allegiance with Mexico so that Germany and Mexico together would invade Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

And he should have known that you never mess with Texas. And so on the 6th of April 1917, Woodrow Wilson signed the declaration of war against Germany. And in that moment, everything changed for the United States.

From a nation wanting to stay out of this war and live in peace and harmony and let the war rage somewhere else, they shifted their mentality very quickly into a full-blown wartime mentality.

Within two and a half weeks, on the 27th of April 1917, Congress passed the Liberty Loan Act to raise funds for the war effort.

And \$20 billion was raised from American citizens within the next two years. The same citizens who wanted to stay out of the war. On the 18th of May, this is a few weeks later, six weeks after the declaration of war, Congress passed the Selective Services Act.

[ 2 : 40 ] 24 million men between the age of 21 and 30 were registered for military action. Three million were drafted immediately for service. On the 15th of June, a couple of weeks later, the Espionage Act puts a 20-year prison sentence on anyone who hinders the war effort or aids the enemy in any way.

On the 10th of August, the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act gave the US Food Administration and the Federal Fuel Administration powers to increase production, to reduce waste, and to crack down on any speculators who were attempting to make any money whatsoever out of the war effort.

The 3rd of October, the War Revenue Act increased corporate and personal income taxes and establishes excessive profits and luxury taxes.

The 5th of April, 1918, the War Finance Corporation is formed with capital of \$500 million to support war industry.

And so from the declaration of war in April, 1917, to the armistice in November, 1918, 4.744 million Americans take part in frontline combat and 116,000 would die.

[ 4 : 08 ] That's just over 18 months. All that in 18 months from going from peaceful, leave us alone, we're the greatest country in the world, to full-blown wartime mentality where the nation gets behind it in quite a massive way.

You see, during wartime, everything changes. Everything shifts. And I want us to see today from Ephesians chapter 6 that as Christians, we're in war and we are in a war that's far more devastating than any world war.

The stakes are infinitely higher. World Wars I and II devastated the world with 120 million deaths in about 11 years.

The war that we're involved in sees over 50 million people a year slip into a Christless eternity. As one person has described it, it is a conveyor belt of corpses slipping into a Christless eternity.

Now this message that I'm preaching tonight wasn't on our preaching roster a month ago. I believe that this one is pretty crucial for us to understand at this stage of our vision and mission as a church.

[ 5 : 31 ] I'm convinced that we need to hear it because I'm concerned that maybe we've lost sight of the reality of the war that we're in. There's just a few elements of it for me.

The latest National Church Life Survey reports that only 14% of St. Paul's Chatswood looks for opportunities to share their faith. And only 6% say that they would with certainty follow up someone who's drifting from the faith.

Only 6%. Those figures concern me. The worst case is that they reveal apathy or indifference to the war for souls that we're engaged with.

Over the past five years or so we have been reforming what we do as a church. For me it flows out of a biblical conviction more than it being effective strategy although strategic thinking is part of the direction we've been heading.

And this year we will take further steps to reform even further what we do as a church to align ourselves I believe even more with the biblical design that God has for his church and I'm convinced that Satan hates it.

[ 6 : 48 ] The biblical design that God has for his church is what you see unfold in the book of Ephesians. It's God's grand purposes for his people for the church for the world from eternity to eternity.

Ephesians chapter 1 2 and 3 reveal what God is doing about all the mess that this universe is in. It reveals that he cares about it quite deeply.

The disintegration and the disorder the chaos the brokenness the sin is all solved by Jesus Christ being made king over all things it's what we just sang a moment ago.

And under his kingship all that's disintegrated in the world gets integrated in him. And God's purpose is to create a single new humanity through the death and resurrection of his son the Lord Jesus.

The death and resurrection of Jesus which is the core element the core fact the foundation the hope of the Christian faith is the solution to the sin the evil the chaos the brokenness of this world.

[ 8 : 03 ] Makes it very clear that there is no other way to find salvation there's no other rescue plan for this world than the blood of Jesus.

Ephesians 4 5 and 6 how to live in accord with the reality of who it is that we are as a church as Christians who are now united in Jesus Christ.

And so Ephesians is rich with the mystery of election the wonder of salvation peace with God unity amongst believers giftedness that we that God gives us change our hearts so that we serve each other and we serve this world in humility so we've got things like unity and diversity and peace and purity and harmony these are some of the wonderful characteristics of this new society this new life in Jesus and they are such exalted thoughts and just when you think that Paul would get to the end of Ephesians he'd get to the end of chapter 6 that he'd kind of finish with and they all lived happily ever after he in effect he grabs us by the throat and slaps us in the face to wake us up from our dreamy reflection you see what this letter does is it closes unexpectedly with the ugly blood and grime of warfare with evil the beautiful life that Ephesians is preoccupied with is lived out while camping in the trenches of war in enemy territory and it's so crucial for us to understand that so crucial for us in terms of understanding what the Christian life is like imagine you've just won a contract to build a hospital and it's a hospital in a land where there is no hospitals and people are dying and being ravaged by disease and sickness and so you have an opportunity to build this hospital in this land to bring healing and health to a people who are desperately in need of it and you assemble the architects and the engineers and the designers and the builders for this wonderful plan and this wonderful vision of what's going to happen everyone's excited about this building project and what good it will do when it's accomplished and just before you head off you've got everyone who's got the plans tucked in your arms and just before you head off the resourcer of it all the person who dreamed it all up says just one little piece more information

I've got to give you one last thing the hospital that you're building is located in hostile territory the people that the hospital is for don't want you to build the hospital and in fact they're going to frustrate your work to build the hospital and in fact they'll probably attempt to kill you in the process of building a hospital that's an important piece of information it will change the way you build the hospital change your expectations and Ephesians 6 12 does that for us for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world against the spiritual force of evil in the heavenly realms in other words there is a war raging it's an unseen war raging J.C. Ryle he was born just over 200 years ago went on to become the first

Anglican bishop of Liverpool he was a critic of ritualistic Christianity in the Anglican church which he was part of as an Anglican bishop he's a critic of it that is people just going through the motions of tradition standing where they need to sitting where they need to attending church but actually having no impact on their life he once preached a message about the war that the Christian is involved in and he said this true Christianity he said mind that word true there is a vast quantity of religion current religious current in the world which is not true it's not genuine Christianity there are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday and call themselves Christians but you never see any fight about their religion of spiritual strife and exertion and conflict and self-denial and watching and warring they know literally nothing at all such

[ 12 : 54 ] Christianity may satisfy man and those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible true Christianity is a fight the true Christian is called to be a soldier must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death he's not meant to live a life of religious ease indulgence and security he must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and doze along the way to heaven like one traveling in an easy carriage verse 10 Ephesians 6 opens with the word finally but it's not signaling Paul's final thought it's not like he's going well you know I'm nearly at the end of Ephesians this letter so finally here's my last point it's word that's probably better to understand is for the remaining time what Paul's indicating here when he says finally in verse 10 is that the whole of the remaining time before

Christ's return is going to be characterized by what I'm about to say the peace which God has made through Christ's cross is to be experienced only in the midst of relentless struggle against evil verse 12 says it's not a war against flesh and blood it's a supernatural war it's a personal war too the word struggle has connotations of hand to hand combat it's a swaying back and forth while locked in mortal combat breath against breath sweat on sweat it's also a futile war if fought in and by our own strength we are involved in a battle with a formidable enemy Paul's quite specific about them verse 12 it says rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms the consensus of the bible is that this world is satan's domain that is it's the place where he does his work it's where he does his bidding if you like 1

Timothy sorry 1 John 5 19 says we know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one 2 Corinthians 4 4 4 the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God and in Ephesians 2 2 the devil is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient this is the devil's world which is why he was able to make a genuine offer of the kingdoms of the world to Jesus if only he would bow down and worship him in Matthew 4 and what we see from the Bible is the devil and his angels are a great demonic enemy with a defined and disciplined chain of command Satan is terribly powerful but he does not possess anything like the power of God though he can only be in one place at one time with his army of evil spirits he imitates

God's omnipresence and his omnipotence that is God's ability to be everywhere at all time and his power over all things that is what Satan desires more than anything else is he desires to be God and his desire to be God is at the center of his terrible total and spiritual evil verse 12 alludes to this in describing the enemy as the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil and there are plenty of people throughout history of humanity who have gone very low in evil but they do not match Satan's evil at all you see Satan's got no conscience no compassion no remorse no morals he feeds on pain and anguish and filth there's nothing about him at all that is redeemable there is no virtue he is literally a dark void and his schemes are cunning verse 11 speaks of the devil's schemes or another way of saying it the devil's methods and he's been honing these methods for millennia he's an accomplished philosopher theologian psychologist he has studied for thousands of years enough time to be astonishingly brilliant at every discipline he's the ultimate manipulator subverter and actor 2 Corinthians 11 says that one of his deadly methods is he masquerades he acts as if he's an agent of

God's he specialises in many dirty techniques to win this battle he's not governed by a Geneva convention in spiritual warfare he desires to win and when I say win what he desires ultimately is to destroy and one of his techniques is he mixed just enough truth with falsehood to make something sound plausible another is sensuality many souls are sold to accommodate a downward spiral in morality another is instilling doubts about God's goodness whatever his tactic is he seldomly attacks openly his strategies which is administered by his devils are nearly always unseen they are shrewd and they are perfectly tailored for every victim he operates best when he convinces people of his non-existence especially he does that in the west he persuades us in the west that the Christian life is not a fight that he doesn't exist in other parts of the world like Africa and in the east he generally convinces people that he's more powerful than anything else and so fear is rampant he's evil beyond our comprehension and without conscience or principle he is diabolically cunning and he is after us that's the consensus of scripture he hates

[ 19 : 20 ] God he hates God's children he hates the church he hates the mission and vision of St. Paul's to see Jesus known treasure and represented in such a way that more and more people from our culture and from our community are rescued from all different backgrounds are rescued from his evil clutches I would suggest he hates our plan to be transcultural he desires to destroy the work of the father to make one society in Christ forever which is exactly what we are working towards as a church here in multicultural Chatswood he desires more than anything else for the church just to be split up he loves that he loves the way things are generally put this group over there and that group over there all the barriers that the gospel had brought down everything that Jesus died for and smashed down he loves it when the church puts them back up again splitting people up into groups we're like and like whereas the picture the beautiful picture of

Ephesians is the barriers are broken down and even mortal enemies of Jews and Gentiles are now living together in a new society and loving one another because of what Christ has done he will do whatever he can to destroy the work of the gospel of the Lord Jesus in your life and in the life of this church that is Paul's cosmic perspective in all its chilling implications and this war is something that I've become aware of here at St.

Paul's in recent months something that I'm seeing and feeling myself something that the wardens and parish council and the staff as well as a whole number of leaders around this place are experiencing and feeling and seeing there are a number of great things that God is doing amongst us I'm convinced of that and so naturally it draws the attention of the enemy and so I decided to put this message in here because I want the whole church to be aware of it to be alert to be prayerful and be prepared especially so because in the coming months we're going to make some even more shifts in the way that we do church to align ourselves more and more with God's plan for his church for all time and eternity we are planning to in greater measure display the unifying power of the glory of the Christian gospel and I'm convinced that Satan hates it he wants to distract us from it having said that I would think that all would be to spare except

I've only given you part of Paul's cosmic perspective you see on earth amongst mortals Satan has no equal but in the heavenly realms he is far far far far exceeded by the triune God there's no dualism here there's no you know Satan and God and hopefully one day God will ultimately have the upper hand but whenever God turns his back and fix up some problem there Satan's havoc over here and oh my goodness I've got to go and fix that one up now there's no dualism there's not the dualism of Hollywood where you just hope that good beats evil which it generally does otherwise it wouldn't sell movies Satan is not God's equal Satan is finite God is infinite in fact Colossians 1 and 2 says that the entire spiritual realm owes its existence to Christ including thrones powers rulers authorities both invisible and visible both in heaven and on earth but Christ is not just more powerful by virtue of being

Satan's creator but because he in fact defeated Satan at the cross Satan and his crew are under Christ's feet that's what the early chapters of Ephesians make really clear for us he has sealed their doom and although in his present age they still exercise a bunch of control over those who have not found freedom in Christ if you are filled with the spirit of God if you align yourself with Christ Satan's forces cannot subdue you they can influence you but they cannot subdue you in Christ there's always always victory but real Christianity is a fight but the fight is the Lord Jesus fight that's the good news however the battling is ours and Paul leaves two commands that dominate his advice in these last verses of the letter the first is in verse 10 he says finally be strong in the

[ 24:17 ] Lord and in his mighty power that command is in fact is a passive command it is be strong in the Lord or in fact be made strong in the Lord find your strength in him Christ has the victory and Ephesians 1 and 2 declare that he has given us the resources to stand and flourish we cannot fight this war by ourselves we are totally dependent upon Christ the power is his and without his strength we will falter and we will fall and yet the call here is even though all the victory is his and all the powers his and all the resources are his the call is we still need to be made strong in him and so what Paul does here is he expresses an appropriate combination of divine enabling and human cooperation working with the divine enabling and he does it again in the second command where he says and this is how we are to be made strong in the

Lord second command verse 11 put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes and without these armor of God's we'll be fatally unprotected but we need to take it up put it on that's our responsibility God has made provision for us in Christ so that we can stand and we will not fall and that provision is his armor and so if you aim to persevere in the Christian life and not just persevere but to flourish in the Christian life and not be defeated by all the schemes and the methods of the devil then you must put on the armor that's described in these verses we're we're told we're told four times of the need to stand Paul is very concerned here about the need for Christians to have firm stability as the battle rages stability wobbly Christians who don't have a firm foothold in Christ are easy prey to

Satan he wants to see Christians so strong so stable that they are so stable especially in the face of Satan's schemes even as verse 13 says when the day of evil comes or the time of special pressure Paul is concerned that he wants us to stand really strong in that moment and so the full armor is essential I'm going to quickly go through this really quickly verse 14 it says the belt of truth held the sword in its place to stand firm in the battle you must be a person filled with the truth the revelation of God's scriptures and for that truth to transform you into a person of truthful character it's especially important in a world where there is no absolute truth apparently it's all been rejected absolute truth is rejected and yet ironically and strangely also filled with counter truth claims secondly the breastplate of righteousness verse 14 was a image that we had up there the metal piece which covered the front of the body to protect all the vital organs and especially the heart the breastplate of righteousness is

God's own righteousness which is freely given to those who truly believe in Jesus Christ that is this is the good news of the Christian gospel Christ right standing before God perfect obedience to God perfect peace perfect harmony becomes ours because on the cross he took all of our unrighteousness and not just dealt with our unrighteousness but he credited all of his good works all of his righteousness all his perfect standing with God to us a great protection against the thrust of Satan which reminds us consistently of our unrighteousness and our unworthiness before God and I know there are people sitting in this room right now who are struggling with that issue and I would encourage you to take up the breastplate of righteousness and realize that you have perfect standing perfect standing in God through Christ plunged into darkness the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ thirdly feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace verse 15 what Paul has in mind here that the boots that the soldiers wore they were especially designed for traction which is what you need if you're in face to face combat it's the gospel of peace the peace with God that comes to us through the gospel the Christian message through the

Lord Jesus that plants our feet firmly and gives us stability in battle it's the peace that says there is no war between you and God perfect harmony between you and God in Jesus the wars between you and the evil one what Satan does he says no no no I'm on your side God's the one who's against you whereas the gospel of peace gives you firm stability the war is with Satan not with God number four the shield of faith verse 16 as you are locked in battle what the enemy does is he just repeated volleys of blazing arrows of temptations and rejection and criticism and hypocrisy and deceptions and doubting of God's goodness doubting the truth of his word doubting that God even exists and in that moment comes up the shield of faith where I'm trusting believing in what

[ 30 : 32 ] God has declared to be true and right and not what Satan is throwing at me five is verse 17 the helmet of salvation helmet of salvation protects my mind it's a confidence that no matter what happens in this battle no matter what happens in this war no matter what loss there is to me I will be saved and I will always experience victory in Christ that's the helmet of salvation sword of the spirit verse 17 we are told that it's the word of God what we are to understand about the sword of the spirit is that when we take up God's word to fight spiritual warfare we have the supreme weapon for both offensive and defensive battle the word of God cuts the heart it lays it open so that people would believe and repent and be made alive in

Christ so they might see as I just read out from 2 Corinthians 5 the light of the glory of Christ the Christian gospel they might see it they might see the beauty and the wonder of Christ we're at war that is our razor sharp weapon and we would be fools to lower it simply because our culture says it doesn't cut our enemy wants us to believe that our weapon is irrelevant it's archaic it's not understandable it's keeping it in its sheath put your trust in something else use something else to win over people to Christ and what the word here is is we must read it we must memorize it we must meditate on it we must study it we must obey it we must love it weapons that we fight with are not the weapons of this world now the christian dressed in their full armor is a fairly formidable picture these verses here are in fact a call to action we will rise and we will use our sword the word of god but it will be bathed in prayer verse 18 says and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests and with this in mind be alert and keep on praying always for all the saints what paul's not doing here is he's not adding an extra bit to the armor it actually this prayer pervades the whole war that's what i would suggest here that you know quite simply the christian gospel we have in christ which is revealed through the word of god by the spirit and prayer which is a privilege so god speaking to us and us speaking to god belong together as the two chief weapons that god puts in our hand to be able to stand firm in the wall in this spiritual battle and not just stand firm but in fact to thrive and to take ground notice there's there's a breastplate of righteousness there's nothing at the back here there's no protection he doesn't envisage that we're going to turn and run the prayer referred to here is comprehensive we're to pray on all occasions both regularly and constantly with all kinds of prayers requests because it takes many and varied forms being alert and always keep on praying because we don't want to ever give up and fall asleep in this battle for all the saints since the unity of god's new society which is the preoccupation of ephesians and the bible and ultimately this church must be reflected in our prayers most christians pray sometimes with some prayers with some degree of perseverance for some of god's people but to replace the word some with all that would just climb us to new dimensions I believe as a church and against such prayer and the principalities and powers are helpless without it we are too feeble and flabby against the mighty forces of evil so that's what we're involved with 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 force of evil and the heavenly realms and the basic weapons of we have is the word of god which reveals the beauty and the glory of christ the magnificence of god the beauty of the christian gospel and prayer and so i would suggest that this time we're up to as a church my first and probably my most simplest challenge is to encourage you to rethink your priorities in those two areas right now commit to a new

resolve today to be a christ-centered bible saturated warrior who's devoted to prayer that's my that's my just simple simple call tonight commit to a new venture with god today to pray for this church to pray for its leadership to pray for its ministries to pray for its mission to pray for lost hearts to know christ to pray for wobbly christians to stand firm pray for it my second simple challenge is linked with what i said last week and that is a call for us to take on a wartime mindset in regard to this war that we're involved in we are encamped in enemy territory and so it makes no sense whatsoever to construct mansions and to build up treasures jesus said that a number of points in the gospels so let us stand together it's a call here for us to stand together with a more time mindset firmly trusting in the power of the lord jesus through his word to bring transformation into people's lives and hearts it is so easy for us in our culture just to give it up and say no no just there's no power in the word of god there's no power and i want to say there is so let's stand firm in it this wartime mindset is where we pour our resources into winning that war we work together to give our time and our treasures and our talents and our prayers and our energy and our resources so i'm concerned if we are not concerned for people who are lost and drifting as those statistics reveal might be the case people are going to hell under the influence of the enemy and one of these chief seductions in the west is to lull us into a comfortable distracted peace time lifestyle now let me say one bit of good news i'm pleased that we saw an immediate response to this the message i preached last week last time i looked earlier in the week the love thy neighbor project which we were seeking to raise 15 grand for and we had about six and a half this time last week last time i looked we had 16 000 against that so that's about a grand more than we were anticipating although 15 grand was the minimum so just keep doing it and another four grand on top of that in demission's account and i knew that the clintos account had about another two and a half put into that as well and so there has been well you know quite a lot in the last few days what i'm calling us to today is to make a sustained effort not just a once off response but a sustained effort to resource the mission that we're involved in so may this reality of the spiritual warfare that we're engaged in move you to action in both word and prayer grasping more and more of the gospel move you to action in reshaping your lifestyle certainly i believe in the next weeks and months as we move up into our vision series in november but ultimately until christ returns in final triumph amen