

October 28, 2007 – Patchogue Church of the Nazarene
SPIRITUAL WARFARE – REAL OR IMAGINED?
Ephesians 6:10-12

War is a fact of life – a reality! The US has been involved in many different conflicts throughout our history as a nation. Some of you have fought for your country in this way and know war firsthand. Those who are engaged in military conflict have no doubt who their enemies are, have a plan to defeat them, and are trained to do battle.

But there is another battle being waged all around us in the spiritual realm. Unfortunately, those engaged in spiritual warfare most often do not know who their enemies are, have no plan for victory, and have little, if any, training. There has been a war going on since before the fall of Satan that many are not even aware of.

Paul gives us this instruction about spiritual warfare that we need to take to heart.

A final word: Be strong with the Lord's mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:10-12

We are studying the book of Revelation in our small group on Wednesday nights here at the church. In one of our recent meetings, we spoke about the reality of the spiritual battle we are all in and the final battle in the end times fought in the heavenly realms. Willy asked why these things aren't taught in our services to prepare and enlighten the people as to the reality of the spiritual battle we ARE in every day. That prompted me to preach about Spiritual Warfare today, so if you don't like this sermon, blame Willy. If you think it is timely and helpful, then you can think that I am spiritual and hearing from God for you all today. ☺ I want to look at five realities today about Spiritual Warfare...

1. Reality - There Is An Invisible World

We generally don't have a problem accepting things we can hear, see, touch, smell, or taste as REALITY. However, when it comes to things that are invisible, we think these things are not as real for some reason. Things I see are real; things I can touch are real; things I hear are real, but what about the things that are invisible? Are they real or imagined? Unless they meet the criteria of our God given senses they must not be real. Nothing can be further from the truth!

Paul teaches about this in many places, but the our text today says it clearly:

For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

While we exist in this present visible world, we also exist simultaneously in the unseen world that Paul describes here. The unseen world is described as the place where evil beings exist, but it is also the place Christ, and all believers exist.

God...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. Ephesians 1:3b

This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 1:19b-20

For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms all because we are one with Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6

Beyond this world of our senses is the unseen world where all that is of a spiritual nature dwells -- both good and evil -- and it is in this invisible world that spiritual warfare takes place -- it is in this unseen world that we fight against the principalities and powers that seek to destroy us.

2. Reality - We Are Involved In An Invisible War

The Bible tells us that once Daniel had been praying to God and not receiving an answer to his prayer -- an angel came to him and explained the delay in terms of spiritual warfare:

Then he said, "Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia. Daniel 10:12-13

This reveals that in the world which is unseen by us there is a conflict going on, a conflict of the ages between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan. It reveals that there are satanic forces and heavenly forces, and they are mighty forces to be reckoned with. And it reveals that we are right in the middle of the whole thing.

Once Elisha and his servant were confronted with the army of King Aram which had surrounded the city. The servant saw the chariots of the enemy and began to despair.

"Ah, my lord, what will we do now?" he cried out to Elisha. "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!" The LORD opened his servant's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire. 2 Kings 6:15b-17

God revealed to them that He was ready to do battle on their behalf from the world that

was unseen with human eyes. The spiritual battle that we are in is no less real than it was for Daniel, or Elisha, or any of God's people down through the ages.

Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4

Maybe you are here today and you are not in a relationship with Christ, or perhaps you have trouble even understanding what I am talking about. Maybe you once felt close to God and have been straying away. It just might be that you are engaged in a spiritual war that you are not even aware of and Satan is blinding your mind to the truth. Those of us who are in Christ are here to do battle, not against those of you who are not Christians, but against the Satanic presence that is keeping you from understanding.

We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds. With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Prayer - for the Lord to open the spiritual eyes of those here and rebuke the enemy.

It is quite obvious that God is calling His church to engage Satan in warfare so that we will be strong in the Lord and will be able to break satanic strongholds. This would be more accurately rendered: **strengthen yourselves in the Lord.** Our weapons are not of this world, are not visible, but are unseen weapons like prayer, the Word of God, and trusting in Christ. The decision that we make today, regarding our part in this battle has eternal implications for those who are not yet in a relationship with Christ. We need to begin by honestly considering that some of the struggles, relational conflicts, and misunderstandings about God are caused by satanic opposition.

3. Reality - Our Enemy is Powerful

I woke up the other night thinking about this message. The image I had was of people that were untrained and having to go to war. Weapons were issued, but no one knew how to use them to take care of them and fix them. The entire group was slaughtered in the battle. Do you know how to use the weapons of this warfare? Do you care? If I gave you a gun, and you didn't know how to load it, fire it, handle it, you would get killed. The Word of God is our weapon, and we don't know how use it properly. **Wake up church!**

Christians cannot underestimate the power of our enemy. While we don't want to give him more power than he really has, we make a huge mistake if we think he and his demonic army have no power at all. He is out to kill you just like in a physical war. The enemy is powerful and we are foolish if we think otherwise.

Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Satan is a present reality in our lives whether we like it or not. He wants nothing more than to destroy our faith, take away our credibility, and lead us to stumble into sin. We have to be prepared for his attacks, and we need to show him some level of respect as far as his abilities are concerned.

But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels, did not dare accuse Satan of blasphemy, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you." (This took place when Michael was arguing with Satan about Moses' body.) Jude 9

This is a remarkable section of Scripture that sheds some light on how we should treat Satan. Satan is a fallen creature and an avowed enemy of God, yet Michael the archangel, when disputing about the body of Moses, wouldn't dare say anything that would impugn the dignity of Satan. In a sense we could say that he respected his position and his power. We would be foolish to do anything less -- I've seen these people on TV saying they rebuke the devil -- it is pure idiocy to think they can do something that the archangel Michael wouldn't dare do.

4. Reality - We Must Respect Our Foe, But Not Fear

Military men and women on the TV news tell us about all the different strategies and schemes of the Iraqis and various terrorist groups. They have computer generated models and illustrations that help us to understand what is going on in the way and how our men and women can overcome. It's not that the United States went into this battle with the thought of losing, but they did go in with a level of respect for the enemy and spent much time and poured over much intelligence as they planned their battle strategy. We need to do something very similar as we engage in spiritual warfare.

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. Ephesians 6:11 - (I have a brochure for anyone – ask me)

Once Paul agreed to forgive a brother along with the Corinthian church...***so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:11***

Like Paul, we need to be aware of Satan's tactics if we are going to win the war. Let's look at some helpful ways we can become aware:

A. Satan's Names Reveal His Tactics

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|--|-------------------------------|
| *Satan (adversary) | *Devil (slanderer) |
| *Lucifer (son of the morning) | *Beelzebub (prince of demons) |
| *Belial (without profit) | *Evil one |
| *Tempter | *Prince of this world |
| *Accuser of the brethren | |
| *Representations include a Serpent, a Dragon, an Angel of Light. | |

B. Satan Attacks The Church, By...

*False philosophies - Col. 2:8

Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ.

*False religions - 1 Cor. 10:19

What am I trying to say? Am I saying that the idols to whom the pagans bring sacrifices are real gods and that these sacrifices are of some value? NO!

*False ministers - 2 Cor. 11:14-15

But I am not surprised! Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder his servants can also do it by pretending to be godly ministers. In the end they will get every bit of punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

*False doctrine - 1 John 2:18

Dear children, the last hour is here. You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. From this we know that the end of the world has come.

*False disciples - Matt. 13

*False morals - 2 Thess. 2:7

For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way.

C. Satan Attacks God's People By . . .

*Directing governments - Dan. 10:13

But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia.

*Deceiving men - 2 Cor. 4:4

Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

*Destroying life - Heb. 2:14

Because God's children are human beings--made of flesh and blood--Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death.

*Persecuting the saints - Rev. 2:10

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 'ten days.' Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life.

*Preventing service - 1 Thess. 2:18

We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us.

*Promoting schisms - 2 Cor. 2:10-11

When you forgive this man, I forgive him, too. And when I forgive him (for whatever is to be forgiven), I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes. (He loves to cause division in the church).

*Planting doubt - Gen. 3:1-2

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the LORD God had made. "Really?" he asked the woman. "Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?" "Of course we may eat it," the woman told him.

*Provoking sin and Anger - Eph. 4:26-27

And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.

*Pride - 1 Tim. 3:6; Worry - Matt. 13:22; Self-reliance - 1 Chron. 21:1; Discouragement - 1 Pet. 5:6-8; Worldliness - 1 John 2:16; Lying - Acts 5:3; Immorality - 1 Cor. 5:1-2

*Producing sects/cults - 1 Tim. 4:1

D. Satan's Power Is Limited

*He is created, therefore not omniscient or infinite

*He can be resisted by the Christian - James 4:7

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

*God places limitations on him - Job 1:12

"All right, you may test him," the LORD said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." So Satan left the LORD's presence.

Balance and wisdom are crucial in our assessment of spiritual opposition. To assign too much or too little credit to the reality of demonic activity is to error greatly.

5. Reality - As Believer's In Christ, We Do Not Fight For Victory, We Fight From Victory

Our spiritual enemy is already defeated at the cross of Christ, yet he continues to hurl out lies, insults, and condemnation at the saints. We fight a very real battle against a very real enemy, but we need to know without a doubt that our victory over him is assured. We do not fight for victory, we fight from victory.

Let me quickly run a few scriptures past you that show that even though we are presently engaged in battle, our future victory is written about as if it has already taken place. It is written that way because our victory is sure.

"The time of judgment for the world has come, when the prince of this world will be cast out."
John 12:31

(God) canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ. Colossians 2:14-15

But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.
1 John 4:4

For every child of God defeats this evil world by trusting Christ to give the victory. And the ones who win this battle against the world are the ones who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:4-5

In a classic "Twilight Zone" episode from 1960, an American on a walking trip through central Europe gets caught in a raging storm. Staggering through the blinding rain, he chances upon an imposing medieval castle. It's a hermitage for a brotherhood of monks. The reclusive monks reluctantly take him in. Later that night, the American discovers a cell with a man locked inside. An ancient wooden staff bolts the door. The prisoner claims he's being held captive by the "insane" head monk, Brother Jerome and he pleads for the American to release him. The prisoner's kindly face and gentle voice win him over. The American confronts Brother Jerome, who declares that the prisoner is actually none other than Satan, "the father of lies," held captive by the Staff of Truth, the one barrier he cannot pass. This incredible claim convinces the American that Jerome is indeed mad. As soon as he gets the chance, he releases the prisoner who immediately transforms into a hideous, horned demon and vanishes in a puff of smoke! The stunned American is horrified at the realization of what he has done. Jerome responds sympathetically. "I'm sorry for you, my son. All your life you will remember this night and whom you have turned loose upon the world." "I didn't believe you," the American replies. "I saw him and didn't recognize him," to which Jerome solemnly observes, "That is man's weakness and Satan's strength."

What a true statement that is -- one that I hope we can overcome as we learn of the spiritual warfare that faces us in the days to come.

And the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air... They will make WAR on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful... And a mighty shout came from the throne of the Temple in heaven, saying, "IT IS FINISHED!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake... Rev. 16:17a; 17:14; 16:17b,18

In the end, Jesus will defeat all evil forever. We won't have to fight anymore. We will be there to witness this final war of evil against God, but Jesus has won the battle for us. Until then we are in the battle against the enemy of our souls. Learn to fight the way Gods intends.

Strengthen yourself in the Lord! Don't become a casualty! Fight Back!