

Our Spiritual Battle

(2018 House Church Retreat in PA)

I. The Spiritual Battle (Read Ephesians 6:10-20)

- a. The problem before us: We are in a spiritual battle against Satan and all the unseen forces of evil that are with him: the hosts of wickedness, including Satan's angels.
 - i. Yet most churches and preachers rarely mention Satan, despite the fact that we find mention of him and the forces of evil throughout the New Testament.
 - ii. The picture we get in the Scriptures is that we are in the middle of a war zone, with powerful enemies out to destroy us! This can be hard to see, especially this weekend when we are in such a beautiful, peaceful place here in Pennsylvania.
 - iii. In general, churches do not do a great job opening our eyes to the spiritual battle we are in. For example, most people explain the gospel without even mentioning anything about Satan.
 - iv. A typical presentation of the gospel is along the following lines: "We sinned. As a result, we have a problem; Jesus took care of that problem, so now we can have eternal life."
 1. This ends up being similar to a self-help course; or perhaps being rescued from a pit that we somehow fell into.
 2. This is similar to how some people view raising a family: if you just follow the book and *do everything the right way*, your children are all going to turn out fine. This is like following the instructions when sewing a dress or baking a cake.
 3. This is not what is going on! There is someone shooting at you, your marriage and your children; someone who is out to destroy you. We are in the middle of war!
 4. Let's compare this to what John says: "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8, NKJV)
 - a. This is WHY Jesus came. His mission was to destroy the work of Satan, to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. We cannot fully understand the mission of Jesus if we cut Satan out of the picture!

- b. This is WHY Jesus came. His mission was to destroy the work of Satan, to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. We cannot fully understand the mission of Jesus if we cut Satan out of the picture!
 - c. It's not just about God, us, Jesus our mediator and our sin. We also have *Satan actively involved trying to destroy us.*
- v. Jesus describes his role as the Good Shepherd in **John 10**.
1. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them." (**John 10:11-12**, NKJV)
 - a. Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down His life to save the sheep.
 - b. We are the sheep.
 - c. Satan is the wolf, who comes to devour and scatter the sheep.
 2. Consider the story of David and Goliath. Saul tells the young David that since he is just a boy he can't go up against Goliath. But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it." (**1 Samuel 17:34-35**, NKJV)
 - a. This picture of David laying down his life for the sheep is just like Jesus.
 3. Jesus describes the battle between Satan and Himself as "a strong man, fully armed" being overcome by one who is "a stronger man".
 - a. "Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by

whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters." (**Luke 11:16-23**, NKJV)

- i. In this story Satan is represented by the strong man, who is guarding his palace. We are his captives, "his goods".
 - ii. Jesus, who is even stronger than Satan, storms the palace of Satan to defeat him, and to liberate us.
 - iii. Our salvation, as described here, is very similar to a "jail-break"!
4. Recall that the very first prophecy about the Christ, in **Genesis 3:15**, in a future battle between the offspring of the woman and Satan. Ultimately, the one who would come from the woman would bruise, or crush, the head of the serpent.
- a. This is reminiscent of what Paul says to us in **Romans**: "And the God of peace *will crush Satan under your feet* shortly..." (**Romans 16:20**, NKJV)
5. Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** that the exodus account, is not only a true story, but also provides a roadmap of the life of a Christian.
- a. The people "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," (**1 Corinthians 10:2**, NKJV). Therefore, the Red Sea crossing foreshadowed Christian baptism, a rebirth involving water and the spirit (**John 3:3-5**).
 - b. After they are "baptized", the people are not yet in the Promised Land (which represents heaven for us). First they must undergo a time of testing in the snake- and scorpion-filled Wilderness (which represents the Christian life).
 - c. They all "all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink." (**1 Corinthians 10:3-4**, NKJV); the manna and the water from the rock

foreshadows the spiritual food and drink that sustains Christians, apparently referring to the Lord's Supper.

- d. Therefore, the assembly of the Jews travelling through the Wilderness represented (foreshadowed) the church. In the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX) it is even referred to as the *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία; the same word is generally translated "church" throughout the New Testament).
- e. This may seem a bit overwhelming, as only two people (Joshua and Caleb) made it in the Promised Land. Some may feel there is no hope as I am not in the "top percent" of all God's people, spiritually. However, Paul reassures us that *each of us can make it* successfully. He reminds us that God will not tempt us beyond what we can bear; however, we must persevere to the end. (This is just one place of many that shows how we must not take our salvation for granted, and that the popular concept of "once saved, always saved" is *ridiculous!*)
- f. In *The Life of Moses*, a work by Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395 AD), Gregory further develops the allegory presented by Paul, in ways that strike me as reasonable. For example:
 - i. The land of Egypt represents the kingdom of darkness (the world), in which God's people are held captive.
 - ii. Pharaoh, the ruler of that kingdom does not want to let God's people go, keeps changing the story/lying to the people, and is an oppressive king that keeps piling on burdens on the people. Pharaoh represents Satan, the ruler of the kingdom of darkness.
 - iii. The waters of the Red Sea (foreshadowing our baptism) not only serve as the path of deliverance out of the kingdom of darkness for God's people; they also vanquish (drown) the forces of the evil army.
 - iv. Therefore, in the exodus story we see the same battle against Satan and his forces, there foreshadowed for our benefit!

- v. Again, this is a picture of a great jail break. Moses (like Jesus) rescues God's people from the oppressive king holding God's people in bondage.
6. While Jesus is the "the Lamb who was slain" (**Revelation 5:12**), He is also described as the **Book of Revelation** as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (**Revelation 5:5**). And let us not forget that Jesus is portrayed also in that book as the warrior-king. He leads God's armies into battle and makes war against the forces of Satan and evil.
- a. "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (**Revelation 19:11-16**, NKJV)
7. Paul recounts to Festus and to King Agrippa what Jesus said to him when He first appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus:
- a. "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'" (**Acts 26:15-18**, NKJV)
 - b. All of us should see evangelism in this light, as explained by Jesus Himself to describe Paul's mission!

- c. When you share the Gospel with our friends, do we talk about Satan? Are you thinking, I need to pull this person out of bondage of Satan and pull him or her out of Satan's kingdom?
- b. Why do most Christians so rarely speak about Satan? Some possible reasons include:
 - i. Because we can't see Satan. (but we can't see God the Father, the Holy Spirit, grace, faith, etc.)
 - ii. Over-reaction against people who have used fear of Satan to scare and unrighteously manipulate others.
 - iii. We don't want to appear ignorant or superstitious. (Especially in places like Boston, where many intellectuals and academic types tend to look down on those of us who believe in the Bible.)
 - iv. Or is this just falling prey to another tactic of Satan (ignoring or denying his existence and activity)?
 - 1. What a great tactic employed by Satan! Most people in places like the US rarely think about or often don't even believe in Satan and his strategies.
 - 2. If Satan is absent from the picture people have of this world, then people will *blame God* for all kinds of tragedies: war, genocides, violent crimes, sickness, etc.
 - a. Taking this view, unbelievers often challenge Christians regarding God's existence and nature with the question: "If God is all-powerful and all-good, then why does so much evil exist in the world?"
 - b. Yet, it is Satan who brings about all this destruction!
 - i. Recall the story of Job; it was Satan who attacked Job's family and his health, bringing about so much tragedy. (**Job 1-2**)
 - 3. Also, people who are ignorant of an enemy lurking are generally much easier prey for the attacker. Peter warns us:
 - a. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (**1 Peter 5:8**, NKJV)

- c. We cannot fully appreciate what is going on in the world around us, Jesus' mission, evangelism, and salvation *unless we understand Satan's role*. There are three main actors (God/Jesus, us and Satan) in this drama, not two!

II. Consider the Tactics of Satan, Our Enemy

- a. When Jesus sent out the disciples to preach throughout Israel he told them they must be wise if they are to overcome their enemies who were out to destroy them.
 - i. "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (**Matthew 10:16**, NKJV)
 - ii. We need to be as wise as Satan, the serpent of old, if we are to defeat him and those with him.
 1. We must be constantly praying for wisdom!
 2. We don't want to be stupid and fall to Satan's tactics.
 3. We all need to study Satan: his tactics, his weapons; how he has defeated other strong men in the past; and how others were victorious in overcoming him.
 4. Like playing the tapes of opponents before a championship playoff contest.
 - iii. Don't be fooled! Just because we may understand certain things about God's kingdom (non-resistance, permanence of marriage, baptism, etc.), *don't think that Satan is going to just leave us alone!* No; he is going to be on the attack!
 1. Jesus says to Peter, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." (**Luke 22:31**)
 2. Satan specifically asked to test Job, as well.
 3. **Question:** *Who* do you think Satan is asking for, today?
 - a. **Answer:** In my opinion, *Satan will be most determined to attach those who pose the greatest threat to his own kingdom:* those who are the most serious about following all the teachings of Jesus and who are determined to spread those teachings throughout the world.
- b. Let us consider the classic modes of attack by Satan.
 - i. Sexual temptation.

1. Examples to learn from (defeated): Sodom, Moabite women seducing the Israelites in the Wilderness in **Numbers 25:1-12** (where 23,000 died in one day to teach us a lesson, as Paul recounts in **1 Corinthians 10:8**). Also consider the examples from the lives of David, Samson, Solomon.
 2. Examples to learn from (victorious): Joseph, Phinehas.
 3. Challenges today: internet pornography, music, women dressing immodestly in public.
 4. We need to be serious about sexual sin, to have the attitude of Phinehas in **Numbers 25**. We need to be asking one another about sexual temptations, and to bring sexual sin into the light through confession where it is as problem. We must root this sin out of our lives, and out of the church.
- ii. Greed and materialism.
1. Third soil attack strategy used effectively in the West (including North America and Europe).
 - a. So many Christians in these countries are getting devoured by Satan: their spiritual lives being choked out by pleasure-seeking, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.
 - b. Many Christians who were totally dedicated to God in the beginning, gradually have become “choked out” spiritually. They no longer produce any good fruit for God.
 2. Examples to learn from (defeated): Esau, Ahab.
 3. Examples to learn from (victorious):
 - a. “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” (**Hebrews 11:24-26**)
 - i. Moses said “no” to all the pleasures of Egyptian royalty that were available to him *because he was looking for the greater reward.*
 - b. Other good examples: Elijah, Elisha, and the Macedonian Christians.

iii. Complaining, murmuring.

1. Examples to learn from (defeated): Miriam, who is punished with leprosy in **Numbers 12**; the Israelites in the Wilderness, in **Numbers 14**; and Korah and his followers, in **Numbers 16**.
 - a. We must not be complainers: pulling others down, being critical and negative. (This is a more serious sin than most Christians realize; see **1 Corinthians 10:10-11**).
2. Examples to learn from (victorious): Joshua, Caleb and Moses

iv. Laziness.

1. It is easy to just want to rest; many people are unwilling to work hard.
 - a. Jesus said “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (**Luke 10:2**)
 - b. Spreading the message of the kingdom *effectively* and helping people become Christians is *hard work*. It requires much time and sacrifice, and much self-denial!
 - c. One of the main reasons that the work of the kingdom is lagging: *so few are willing to do the work* required.
 2. Examples to learn from (defeated): the wicked, lazy servant of **Matthew 25:26**.
 3. Examples to learn from (victorious): Daniel; *even his enemies* could not find any fault in his work (**Daniel 6:1-5**)
- c. Activities of Satan today:
- i. Jesus told the church in Pergamum/ Pergamos, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.” (**Revelation 2:13**, NKJV)
 - ii. Where are Satan’s throne cities today? That would include places where he has a spiritual strangle-hold. Some places that come to mind as candidates for Satan’s thrones in our age:
 1. New York City (wealth, power); Hollywood (materialism, immorality); Boston (intellectual worldliness, academic arrogance in rejecting God); Washington D.C. (political power)

2. China – where the Communist Party that controls the country is 100 million members strong; and you *must be an atheist* to be a member. The Party controls access to education, power and career opportunities in that nation.
 3. Middle East – oppressive Islamic rule in many countries, resulting in death, torture or imprisonment for those who convert to the Christian faith (and for those who try to spread it).
- iii. Attacks are different in different theaters of this war
1. Third soil strategy is used effectively by Satan in the West (North America, Europe).
 2. Second soil strategy (persecution) is used to attack Christians in the Middle East today.
 3. First soil strategy predominates in other places, perhaps including China and India (Satan snatches away the seed of the word, so that the people cannot come to faith).
- iv. “False flag” operations used by Satan to confuse people.
1. Definition of what a “false flag operation” is: pretending to be on one side in a war, yet actually being on the other side. This notoriously sneaky tactic is used to discredit one’s enemies.
 2. Counterfeit gospels: on outside it looks and sounds like the gospel, but actually is a very different message from what Jesus proclaimed. This is very dangerous, and leads people way from the true, original gospel message.
 - a. Calvinism and other forms of Protestant Reformation theology teach that we don’t need to follow teachings of Jesus to be saved (just believe in Him).
 - b. The ‘health-and-wealth prosperity gospel’ in various forms. (They distort the gospel to focus on having a comfortable life here, rather than calling followers of Jesus to take up their crosses and focus on the eternal reward.)
- v. Religious hypocrisy
1. A tactic used throughout the ages against all who strive to be to be radical followers of God (including the Pharisees). See **Matthew 23**.

- a. Say the right thing, but don't do it.
 - b. Focus on external things but the heart is full of sin.
 - c. Self-righteous, looking down on others.
 2. We had better watch out for this trap!
- vi. Disunity.
1. In **John 17:14-23**, shortly before going to His death on the cross, Jesus prayed for unity among all his future believers (that we might be one as He and the Father are one). Jesus knew that Satan would be attacking us in this area, especially.
 - a. Satan has done a great job fracturing those who are serious about following Jesus' teachings: creating thousands of sects and denominations; people not taking communion with one another; not talking to one another; and erecting man-made rules that divide the body of Christ.
 2. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (**Hebrews 12:14**, NKJV)
 - a. Many "kingdom Christians" can tend to focus on the *second part* of this verse (seeking to live holy lives; being separate from the world) while ignoring the first part (pursuing peace with all).
 - b. Issues include: gossip, lack of true Biblical conflict resolution (top priority, to forge unity), uncharitable spirit, and bitterness.
 - c. Churches of "perfectionists" seeking absolute doctrinal purity can turn into "circular firing squads", destroying any hope of unity from within, through constant internal criticism, division and factions.
 3. Trying to pluck out all the tares, to create a "perfect (flawless) church".
 - a. Bible clearly calls us to expel the wicked from the church (1 Corinthians 5). Yet at the same time, we are told by Jesus in Parable of the Dragnet and Parable of the Wheat and Tares (**Matthew 13**) that *there will be some* wicked in the church who will only be removed at the end, on the Day of Judgment, by the angels.

- b. Before of the Day of Judgment, the church is not going to be perfect (flawless). There will be some in it who are “tares” (not saved), who will be removed only at the end. Therefore, it is not our job to try to pluck out every tare from the fellowship.
 - i. A brother or sister may do things that I don’t think are good, things that I would not personally do. I can talk to them and raise my concern. However, if it is not clear from the Scriptures that this is sin that puts them out of fellowship with God, after voicing my opinion I need to leave it to the Son of Man and His angels.
 - ii. Our house church is a very imperfect group. However, I believe we are really committed to being united, and to working things out together. If there is an issue, we are diligent to get together and talk things through, to forge unity, address sin, etc.
- c. “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,” (**Matthew 13:41**, NKJV)
 - i. Cyprian (d. 258 AD) was bishop of the church in North Africa during a time of intense persecution. He had strong convictions regarding church discipline; his writings in many places address putting unrepentant sinners out of communion, when and how to restore them, etc. However, he also wrote the following, regarding Parable of the Wheat and Tares:
 - ii. “For although there seem to be tares in the Church, yet neither our faith nor our charity ought to be hindered, so that because we see that there are tares in the Church we ourselves should withdraw from the Church; we ought only to labor that we may be wheat, that when the wheat shall begin to be gathered into the Lord’s barns, we may receive fruit for our labor and work. The apostle in his epistle says, ‘In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some to honor and some to dishonor.’ Let us strive,

dearest brethren, and labor as much as we possibly can, that we may be vessels of gold or silver. But to the Lord alone it is granted to break the vessels of earth, to whom also is given the rod of iron. The servant cannot be greater than his lord, nor may anyone claim to himself what the Father has given to the Son alone, so as to think that he can take the fan for winnowing and purging the threshing-floor, or can separate by human judgment all the tares from the wheat. That is a proud obstinacy and a sacrilegious presumption which a depraved madness assumes to himself." (Source: Epistles of Cyprian, Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 327)

- iii. Note that Origen (c. 185-255 AD), a Christian teacher in Alexandria, drew similar conclusions in his Commentary on Matthew, when discussing the Parable of the Dragnet. (See ANF vol. 9, pp. 420-421)
- 4. Satan can cause division in the Body of Christ through "specialists" in the church who emphasize a few favorite points of doctrine (while *typically ignoring others that they are not following*), who look down on others. That includes Christians who focus almost exclusively on evangelism (offense) while neglecting holiness (defense); and vice-versa.
- 5. Disunity is a powerful tactic that Satan often uses when he can't destroy the church, especially "radical Christians", through other sins. Let us be aware of his tactics and schemes!

III. The Nature of Satan and Our Most Powerful Weapons

- a. Read **John 8:42-47**, regarding character of Satan.
 - i. Satan is a liar and murderer.
 - ii. The father of lies; a liar from the beginning
 - iii. There is no truth in him.
- b. Read what Jesus said regarding himself.
 - i. "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the

truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37, NKJV)

- ii. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31–32, NKJV)
 1. In **John 10** Jesus said that His sheep would hear His voice and follow Him; they would not follow the voice of a stranger. (I think it is because they know the truth when they hear it.)
 2. **Hebrews 6:18** reminds us “It is impossible for God to lie.”
 3. “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (**John 1:17**, NKJV)
 4. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” (**John 17:17**, NKJV)
- c. The battle between Satan and Jesus was between lies and the truth.
 - i. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He came back with the sword of the spirit, the Word of Truth, answering with the pure truth of the Scriptures. (**Luke 4:1-13**)
 - ii. If you love the truth, be sure that God (and Satan) will test you to find out HOW MUCH you really love the truth. Most people eventually fail that test.
 1. “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (**2 Thessalonians 2:9–12**, NKJV)
 2. God will give you stronger and stronger doses of the truth, to find out how much you really love it (and Him).
 3. Many of us were pushed out of church groups because we presented things that we saw as truth from the Bible, which others did not want to hear.
- d. Lesson for us:
 - i. See Satan first and foremost as the great liar. Love the truth no matter the cost; and hate all lies.

- ii. Become experts in the truth, knowing and using it.
 - iii. Spend time with our minds in the truth, so we don't fall prey to the lies of the ruler of this world.
 - iv. Need to love to hear the truth *about ourselves* (our lives, sins and shortcomings), not just about theological doctrines!
 - v. See and use the Word of God (pure truth) as the most powerful weapon in our arsenal to bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus.
- e. Let us understand the spiritual battle we are in, understand the tactics of Satan, and arm ourselves with the truth so we can not only make it to the end; but also rescue many from Satan's kingdom of darkness and bring them into the kingdom of light!