

“The Nature of Spiritual Warfare”

Ephesians 6:11-12

Introduction:

1. To be a Christian is to be part of a new humanity or nation or society that God is making. This is exciting. God by his grace has called us to be a new people, joined to him and each other. Since this basic union in Christ exists, we have a true unity amid our obvious diversity. God has called us out from the old humanity, which is ruined by sin, and made us alive with Christ to be holy and blameless in his sight. This is a joyous calling for this life, and a certain prospect of eternal glory.

2. Yes, all this is very true, and we ought always to praise the Lord for his goodness to us. But we also have enemies, powerful ones, who totally hate God and us and who seek our ruin. “Is God’s plan to create a new society? Then they will do their utmost to destroy it. Has God through Jesus Christ broken down the walls dividing human beings of different races and cultures from each other? Then the devil through his emissaries will strive to rebuild them. Does God intend his reconciled and redeemed people to live together in harmony and purity? Then the powers of hell will scatter among them the seeds of discord and sin.” [Stott] In short, we are in a war. We have seen already from this text that we are spiritually outfitted for battle and have the incalculable asset of the Lord’s mighty power. Now we want to understand more about the nature of this war we find ourselves in.

Exposition:

I. In spiritual warfare the Christian is in conflict with powerful, spiritual enemies.

A. In any kind of war, we must know the identity of the enemy.

1. The battle is not against “flesh and blood”; that is, this battle is not against other humans. The point is not to exclude other people as agents of evil, but to direct us to our real enemy. Evil people are captives who follow Satan’s commands. They need to be set free by God’s grace, before they enter into eternal destruction.

Comment: Diseases like AIDS, famine, and the desolations of war mar much of present life, but they are nothing compared to eternal wrath.

2. But behind evil people are implacable, malicious spiritual enemies who lust for our ruin. We are confronting enemies that are able to operate in the spiritual realm. Humans can strike at us with physical objects and terrible words, but this spiritual enemy can strike where people are not able.

B. In this war, we must realize the power that our enemies possess.

1. The apostle uses a number of terms to impress on our minds the fact that they are powerful: rulers, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil. The idea is not to learn some kind of hierarchy of demons, but to understand that they have ability to strike spiritually against the saints.

Illustration: In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan graphically presents Christian in combat with powers far greater in power. After joining the church (the Palace Beautiful) and learning much, Christian continues on his pilgrimage and goes into the Valley of Humiliation. There he meets Apollyon, and becomes involved in a deadly fight with this prince of darkness. Only God's armor protects Christian from his opponent's fierce blows. When the contest is done, Bunyan writes a short poem about the contest. [Page 58]

A more unequal match can hardly be—
Christian must fight an angel; but you see,
The valiant man by handling sword and shield,
Doth make him, though a dragon, quit the field.

2. We must also be convinced of the total evil of these enemies. They approve of whatever God forbids; whatever God says is good and right, they utterly hate. "If we hope to overcome them, we shall need to bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honor, no higher feelings. They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or partially civilize the weapons of their warfare. They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs." [Stott]

II. In spiritual warfare the Christian faces a cunning opposing commander.

A. Satan thinks up schemes or traps to try to defeat those who follow Jesus.

1. The word for schemes could be translated as “strategies”. He is drawing up battle plans to be used against us. 2 Cor 2:11

2. All these schemes are saturated with deceit and lies, because they come from the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Consider 2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-15; 1 Tm 4:1. This kind of deceptive activity will only increase as we move closer to the coming of the Lord. 2 Th 2:7-12; Mt 24:10-14, 21-25

Apply: How then can you know what is truth or error? You can know by the Scriptures. Jn 17:17

B. Here are eight types of schemes that the devil uses against us to draw us into sin.

1. Satan presents the bait and hides the hook. Gen 3:4-5; Mt 4:8-9

2. Satan paints sin with the colors of religion. 1 Sm 15:15, 22-23

3. Satan lessens the sin or makes it seem less by mentioning all kinds of extenuating circumstances. Josh 7:20-21; 2 Sm 6:6-7

4. Satan talks up the sin of the saints, while hiding their troubles from their sin, the sorrow of their repentance, and their true heart for God: David (2 Sm 11:4; Ps 51:1ff), Hezekiah (2 Chrn 32:24-26), and Peter (Mk 14:71-72).

5. Satan misrepresents sin and its consequences, claiming that sinful people enjoy blessings while the godly suffer. Jer 44:15-18

6. Satan encourages us to compare ourselves with people less religious and moral and in this way builds up our pride. Lk 18:11

7. Satan pollutes minds with dangerous errors that make sin seem less dangerous. Jude 1:4

8. Satan prompts us to choose wicked friends. 2 Chrn 18:1ff; 19:1-3

Point: This is a small selection of the schemes that the evil one uses against us!

Apply: Since we have a powerful enemy that seeks our destruction in many ways, what should we do? We must trust and obey the Lord. Rely on the Lord’s almighty power and put on the armor that he has given for your protection.