

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Take the Gloves Off!

by Dan Trygg

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ And everyone wrestling exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” I Corinthians 9:24-27

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-system-powers of this darkness, against the spiritual-beings of wickedness in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12

I know some people are uncomfortable with the emphasis I have given to spiritual warfare. It really is *not* at the top of my list of things to teach about, but I believe it is so *underemphasized* that most of us are unaware of, and all but blind to, this crucial aspect of the reality described by the Bible. **To ignore it, or to downplay it, is to give the enemy a distinct advantage, ...the advantage of cover. He is then free to work, ...and we ascribe his activity solely to other things,** ...physical sickness, coincidence, a series of unfortunate events, emotional or mental illness, or depression, for example. While he is stirring up trouble, or harassing God's people, we turn a blind eye, and allow him to operate unchallenged. Moreover, **Jesus commissioned us to storm the “gates of hades”, promising that they would not be able to stand against us. If we do not even recognize our enemy, or his strongholds, how can we come against him?** So many churches are *only* evangelizing by sharing the word of God with people, forgetting that we need to bind the strong man, if we are going to successfully plunder his house (Matt. 12:29). Paul told us that **our primary struggle, our conflict, our “wrestling” is NOT with people, or even the minds of people. Our primary area of warfare is with spiritual powers,** evil beings already established in levels of rank and with areas of responsibility -- the “gates of hades”. **We need to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” and “put on the entire armor of God” because we are in a battle with spiritual forces over the souls of people.** We are not primarily in a battle *with* the souls of people. We are in a battle, a wrestling match, an ongoing territorial contest *with* “rulers, authorities, world-system-powers and spiritual-beings of wickedness in the heavenly-places” *over* the souls of people. **Note what Paul says that the armor is for, “that you may be able to stand against the “stratagems, schemes, cunning-attacks, tricks, crafty-plots, and deceptions” of the devil (Eph. 6:10-13). James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the early Jerusalem church, commanded us to “resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). If we ignore, minimize or downplay the enemy's activity, ...if we do not take seriously the “readiness mindset” we need (“be on the alert” – I Pet. 5:8)..., the watchfulness that God Himself commands for us to have, then we shouldn't be surprised if he catches us unawares. If we do not resist him, we should not be surprised if he does not flee.** Why should he? *We let him walk all over us,* and do not lift a finger to *protect ourselves,* or to *oppose* what he is doing!

Let's take a moment to look at the Biblical facts. How often does the Bible talk about these things? “Demons” are talked about 73 times, the “devil” on 34 occasions. “Satan” is mentioned 53 times, and evil or unclean “spirits” are mentioned an additional 47 times. Satan is referred to as a “dragon” in 13 verses, as a “serpent” in 10 verses, and as a hungry lion (I Pet. 5:8). Moreover, there are distinctive levels of demonic authority mentioned in Scripture: rulers (4x), authorities (5x), thrones (1x), dominions (1x), world-powers of this darkness (1x), and the spiritual-things-of-evil in the heavenlies (1x). **All in all, evil spiritual beings operating in our world are mentioned a total of 244 times.** This is nearly *twice* as often as the word for “grace” (131x), or “justice” (138x), and *more than* twice as often as “mercy” (101x), or even “faithful” and “faithfulness” combined (116x). Think of how significant each of those words and concepts are, yet the mention of evil spiritual beings occurs *twice as often* as any of these terms. **While the word frequency cannot be ignored, the placement of these spirit-beings as significant, or even central, to the story line is even more important to observe.** We begin the book of Genesis with the temptation of humankind by the serpent, whom we find out later is Satan (Gen. 3:1-4; Rev. 12:9). In His pronouncement of judgment on the serpent, God lays out the entire overview of salvation history. The “seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent” (Gen. 3:15). He is the third party in the book of Job, whose activity and interference is given as a key explanation for at least some of the inequities of human existence. In the New Testament, Satan and his demonic forces are certainly front and center in Jesus' ministry. **The Lord's ability to defeat Satan and liberate people from demonic bondage were major themes of what the Kingdom of God is all about. Jesus commissioned His followers to also subjugate demons and liberate people from their oppression and torment** (Matt. 10:1; Lk. 9:1; 10:19; Acts 16:18; 19:11,12). Their success at this was remarkable in the minds of the people among whom they ministered, and gave credibility to them and their message (Matt. 4:22,23; 8:16).

When Jesus first talked of His called-out people, it was in the setting of warfare against the entrenched forces of spiritual wickedness, “the gates of hades will not be strong against it” (Matt. 16:18). The only way for the “gates of hades” to be in conflict with the “called-out-people of God” was if the church were on the *offensive*, trying to root out evil and liberate people. The picture of the “gates” not being “strong-against” the church would have been a well-recognized word picture for Jesus’ audience. **They would have immediately known that the church was in attack mode, battering down the gates of satanic strongholds and fortifications.** This is not just a friendly, respectful knock, and a polite request to vacate the premises. *Everyone at that time knew that when a city was under siege, the army at the door would batter the gates to smithereens, if the city did not surrender.* For Jesus to mention that the gates would not “be-strong-against” certainly implies a protracted, hard-hitting, batter-and-splinter type of offensive. **Sometimes, a city would surrender, but if they did not, then a siege would be laid against it, until the gates or walls were breached. That is the first picture Jesus used to describe the Church!**

In I Corinthians 9, Paul’s entire argument revolved around living one’s life *intentionally*. He designed his lifestyle, made his plans, allocated his time, expended his efforts so that he might win people to follow Jesus Christ. In the verses at the top of this study, he encourages us to live intentionally as well. **He used the illustration of Olympic athletes, ...runners, wrestlers, boxers..., to drive home his point. Those athletes were serious.** They were not just playing. They weren’t just going through the motions. **They made huge lifestyle sacrifices to become the best they could be. They were competitive. They worked hard.** They trained to build strength, and to perfect their form, so they could accomplish their goal. They went to all this effort to receive only a perishable wreath, a crown made out of parsley, pine needles or olive leaves, a symbol of their accomplishment.

Paul makes the application to the Corinthians. Lots of contestants run in the races, but only one can *win* the race. He says, “Run in such a way that *you* may win.” Obviously, he is not talking about running a physical race. **He is using that illustration to encourage them to get serious, ...to get focused. Why? Because they weren’t! They were dabbling, ...they were playing, ...they were like sports groupies, instead of serious competitors. Paul said he was not like that. He was not just running without purpose.** He wasn’t just shadow boxing. No. **He was training for a real fight!** He said, “I pommel my body and subdue it, ...make it *my* slave..., lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” That last word, “disqualified”, literally means to “be tested and be unapproved”, ...to “fail the test”, when the test comes, and therefore to be useless, and rejected. It is not enough to *train*. (If people would even take their faith *that* seriously!) You have to have the stomach and will to get in the real action, ...to run the real race against other competitors, ...to get on the mat, or in the ring, with an actual, hostile opponent.

Here is the real point of this study. We are not called to just attend church services. We are not called to just read our Bibles and pray. No. **We are to train to come up against real spiritual beings who are entrenched in peoples’ lives, and drive them out.** We are to prepare ourselves for real spiritual warfare, ...real spiritual assaults. This is not a game. It is not inconsequential. **Peoples’ lives are at stake. Their freedom, their future lives here on this planet, their eternal destiny is at stake.** By minimizing these things, we can justify a lower level of commitment and focus. Paul says, “No!” Run so that you can win! Train and spar so you will be ready for a real opponent! I am not necessarily talking about some spiritual SWAT team of “deliverance ministers”. **I am talking about recognizing and “standing against” or “resisting” the cunning attacks of the enemy** in your own life, and the lives of those around you, ...as you can (Eph. 6:13; Jas. 4:7). **I am talking about tearing down the fortifications or “strongholds” by confronting the lies with the truth** (II Cor. 10:3-5). **I am talking about learning how to pray and intercede in such a powerful and effective way as to bind the work of the enemy, and to set people free** from satanic bondage.

Instead of shrinking back from wanting to hear more, or saying that we ought to move on to other things, I want to know **why are you not pouring over the Scriptures to find out more?** I want to know **why would you not want to investigate further?** Why aren’t you getting books on spiritual warfare, or studying *more* about dealing with these issues? **Why aren’t you learning more about effectual prayer, and engaging in it seriously? Why aren’t you acting as if these things matter?** Is it because you don’t really believe? If you don’t, then *who* are you doubting, ...me? ...my interpretation? ...or God’s Word itself? **What are you thinking, ...that you don’t really have an enemy, ...that nothing is amiss?** Are you thinking that God is not expecting more from *you*? **Are you thinking that all God wants is for you to be happy and comfortable in your own little “bubble”?** **Who do you think put those thoughts in your mind?** God thought it was serious enough to come live among us, to endure horrendous spiritual and physical torment, and to die to set you free. The apostles all were imprisoned, mistreated and nearly all were martyred for their faith. It is estimated that over 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ, and countless others maligned and mistreated. *Why?* Because **we have an enemy, who wants to steal, kill, destroy and render us ineffective any way he can.** We overcome him by the blood of Jesus, and by not loving the comforts of this natural life (Rev. 12:11). **We are called to stand against and oppose him, ...not turn our eyes away.**