

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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There's More: Learning to Recognize and Address Spiritual Warfare

by Dan Trygg

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies.” Ephesians 6:10-13

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...” 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty in God for the tearing-down of fortresses, ⁵ tearing-down reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the experiential-knowledge of God, and taking every perception captive to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

“Be clear-minded, be alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself equip, confirm, strengthen and establish you. ¹¹ To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:8-11

Spiritual warfare is a key part of the backdrop to the story of the Bible. From the earliest chapters of Genesis, we discover that there is a conflict between good and evil. From the beginning of the NT, we discover the reality of a personal devil (Matt. 4:1f; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:1f), intelligent demons (e.g., Lk. 4:33-41), and that the kingdom of God has come to expose, defeat and remove the powers of darkness (1 Jn. 3:8). Jesus repeatedly cast out demons, as He went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and He taught His disciples to do the same by His authority. **In Jesus' first description of “the church”, He described our mission as coming against the “gates of Hades”** (Matt. 16:18). The entrenched strongholds of Satan will not be able to hold out against the advance of Jesus' people, as they spread His kingdom throughout the world. **It should come as no surprise, then, that we, as disciples of Christ, are to learn to recognize the signs of spiritual warfare, and become equipped to deal with it effectively.**

It is important to acknowledge that this **spiritual conflict is happening all around us, every day, and is touching and influencing our lives.** It is like we were born on a battlefield. The war is waging all around us. **To ignore it is to be pushed around, ensnared and victimized by it, with no ready defense.** As we become more active in our pursuit of Christ and serving Him, He will begin to equip us to recognize its telltale signs, and to resist and free ourselves from its negative influence. **Again, it is already at work in and around you. We are not to be content to coexist with the influence and schemes of the enemy.** His motive is to steal, kill and destroy. We cannot afford to allow him to have his way in our lives. **God has called us to become alert, clear-minded, and to oppose what he is doing.** A disciple is a ready and attentive learner, one who is eager to put new insights and skills into practice. We are going to limit the focus of today's study on more basic kinds of things that many of us already experience, saving deeper-level things for future study.

The first place where the scriptures indicate that spiritual warfare has an impact on people is that **Satan “blinds the minds of the unbelieving** in order that they might not see the light of the gospel”. Paul says that the gospel is “veiled to those who are perishing”, because of this (2 Cor. 4:3,4). **The first place that spiritual warfare impacts people is that the influence of Satan interferes with their ability to perceive the light of revelation about the truth of Jesus.** The word for “mind” here is not describing the ability to *think*, it is describing the ability to *perceive*. The “god of this age” is a reference to Satan. Paul says that he “blinded, blocked, obscured, or darkened” the ability of these people to accurately perceive the revelation of truth. In Jesus' parable of the sower, He described how **Satan also comes along to “take away” the message of the good news, when people are exposed to it** (Mk. 4:14). Apparently, he redirects their thinking so that the word of God cannot get established in their minds. This is an important realization. **The enemy will try to interfere with people's perception of the message, and he will also attempt to keep them from thinking about it, so that they will not understand and grasp the truth.** Preaching the message will never be sufficient, for this reason. We must address this activity of the enemy to interfere and distract from the message. We do this through prayer.

A related passage indicates a similar issue that is common even among Christians. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul speaks of how we must “tear down strongholds”, ...tearing down fortifications of thought, arguments, reasonings, internalized messages, and beliefs that have been “lifted up” in our minds, and are “set against” the experiential-knowledge of God. This is similar to the previous area, in that **the language suggests that spiritual beings have constructed erroneous thought-patterns and beliefs in our perception of God, the world and ourselves.** These established messages are designed to block our ability to experience God. They make it difficult to

perceive, believe, or accept that God really loves us, or that we can trust Him. Consequently, we sift out and shunt off to the side anything that does not fit with these pre-established beliefs. **We may have deeply-embedded feelings of worthlessness and rejection that keep us from believing that God loves us, or that we are worthwhile.** These messages block out the truths of God's grace, our new birth in Christ, and what God is calling us to become for His kingdom purposes. **Paul says that we have weapons to fight these lies. These weapons are mighty with God's empowerment.** In addition to prayer, we are to "take every erroneous thought captive to the obedience of Christ". The word for "obedience" is to "hear under". **Every thought must come into alignment with what Jesus says is true.**

A third area where we may see spiritual warfare at work is in the area of spiritual "push back". This is a very common phenomenon, and is evident in different ways. **Many times, when the kingdom of God advances, through preaching and effective ministry, there will soon follow a rise of opposition against those who are bringing the gospel.** We can see this happen repeatedly, both in Jesus' ministry, and the ministry of the apostles. Persecution often follows an advance of the gospel. The word "devil" means "malicious gossip" or "slanderer". It is his stock in trade to stir up lies and false representations of what the gospel is about, or about those who are proclaiming it. If he can't succeed in turning outsiders against the ministry, he will attempt to cause strife and divisions within the body of believers. **These attacks are designed to malign and discredit the ministry, or to disrupt and deter it by sowing discord and confusion from within.** To combat this, there must be ardent prayer, humility, forgiveness, and plain talk about priorities and unity. We must defer to love and graciousness, and determine not to feed the fire of gossip or slander. **"Push back" or spiritual attacks can come against our property, our possessions, our family, or our physical health, as well.** We need to be prayerful and watchful. The enemy is vengeful, and full of rage. If not for the protection of God, he would destroy us all. God only permits what He can work out for good, though that can sometimes be a painful challenge for us.

The apostle Peter mentions that the enemy prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour whomever he can. He is an opportunist, looking for a way to attack us when we are unawares, when our defenses are down. Peter referred to him as "your adversary". This particular word means "an opponent at law". He is a legal strategist, trying to find a reason to accuse us before God, and attack us. **We overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our own personal testimony, and by not loving our natural-life even to the point of death** (Rev. 12:11). What that means is that we are willing to lay anything down rather than turn from following Christ. If we are under the blood of Jesus, born from above children of God, and there is nothing we love more than God, Satan has no power against us. Of course, that is the most extreme scenario. **Most of us will not be called to lay our lives down, but the enemy may be able to entice us away from the action with "lesser things". We need to be clear-minded, and stay alert.** As disciples, we are called to take a different path than those who are not following Jesus. We are called to pursue a higher calling, to live for God and not for ourselves. The way of the world is the path of least resistance. To follow Jesus will lead us head on against the prevailing culture, in many ways. **If we are going to live effectively for Jesus, it will call for making sacrifices and to stand up strong against the works of the enemy.**

How do we stand against spiritual warfare? We stand strong in Jesus!

God does provide what we need to overcome the enemy. Back in Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul told us that **the first thing we are to do is to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.** HE is your strength and your defender. To be strong in the Lord is to get your heart in right relationship to Him, ...to confess your sins, and to surrender yourself to Him and His will. Ask Him to fill you with His power. Draw near to Him, and then, from that place of oneness and abiding, you will be empowered to resist the enemy. **Then, we are to put on the whole armor of God.** The armor described here is the armor of a Roman soldier. **As you examine the parts described, each part relates back to Jesus.** The belt of truth, ...Jesus is the Truth! The breastplate of righteousness, ...Jesus is our righteousness! Binding on your feet the readiness to share the gospel, ...the gospel is the good news about Jesus! In every circumstance taking up the door-shield of faith, ...your faith is in Jesus and what He did! (The door-shield means that we are to fight *alongside of others* in the company of those committed to Christ. We are not lone individuals. We are a group.) The helmet of salvation, ...Jesus is our salvation! The short-sword or dagger of the Spirit is the *rēma*-word of God, ...the instruction from Jesus! **All of our protection and ability to stand firm in the day of spiritual battle is because of what HE did, and who HE is, ...and because we are in Him, and covered by Him. And, then, to stand firm in Him.** And, "by means of every prayer and entreaty, praying in every occasion in the Spirit, and unto this purpose, being alert in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints." **Draw near to God, ...be strengthened with His power, ...put on Jesus Christ as your armor and commander, ...stand firm in resistance to the enemy, ...and pray with perseverance. The same goes for tearing down strongholds. Every thought must come under agreement with Him.**

This is a spiritual war. There *will be* skirmishes, battles, struggles. There will be suffering and loss. But God promises that **He will equip us, confirm us, strengthen us and establish us.** He will have dominion forever and ever.