

The Unseen Realm

Spiritual Warfare, Session 1

The Unseen Realm

The first sign that something was wrong was when I glanced down at the water rushing past our fishing trawler in the wrong direction! The net that my father and I were towing along the bottom of the sea bed had caught on something heavy, something on the bottom of the seabed. We put our winches in gear and slowly pulled the boat back against the tide toward the object which was stuck in our net. Inch by inch we heaved the net with our two ton winch straining at the weight. Our fishing boat, the Why Worry, leaned heavily over as she creaked and groaned, the derrick and mast taking the strain. When the net had been pulled to the surface, there nestling squarely in the Cod End, was the biggest of the German Second World War Magnetic mines, a whopping 12 foot long mine still in gleaming pristine condition with 1500 pounds of high explosive. Designed to blow ships completely in half, it was now swinging to and fro just inches above our deck as the waves were making us roll. With a heavy clunk we rested the mine on the deck. Made of stainless steel, it looked as if it had just been laid there on the bottom of the sea bed near my home port of Harwich, Essex, England. It had been buried beneath the mud in a very familiar piece of fishing ground, a place we had fished over again and again. The chains at the front of the net must have just caught it perfectly, dislodging it from its resting place, pulling it straight out of the mud. Once we cut the mine out of our net we then had to get it over the side again without incident, a delicate task, considering that it was still in such good condition and it was possible that it could still explode. Fishermen had heard of such things happening, boats just disappearing, not accounted for. With the whole boat leaning over, we gently lowered it back into the sea and carefully cut through the rope strop, releasing it from our net. Then to our amazement, the mine stood up in the water, the top part of it still showing! We had not realized how shallow the water was and how much water was under our boat where we let it go. We called the Coastguard to come and detonate the mine, so that it would not be a danger to any other boats. On the next high tide they

put it on a long rope and towed it out to deeper water and blew it up. We heard later that in between the high tides, at the low water point, people were walking on the secluded beach wondering what this 12 foot monstrosity was that was standing up on the beach at low tide!

What you don't see.....?

Just because you may be unaware of something, that does not mean it cannot affect you. There is an old saying "what you don't know can't hurt you." Although it is true that knowledge can bring with it pain, it is much better to be forewarned about danger than to ignore it. This was the first of a number of near-death experiences that God used to wake me up to ponder spiritual things.

Warm-up question: When did you first start to ponder spiritual things? What event or person initiated this?

Alternative question: Have you ever become aware of something in your life that was dangerous to you or your loved ones? How did you deal with it?

It brings the truth home to me that just as we had gone over that familiar fishing ground again and again, there was something unseen to us that could have affected our lives in a dangerous way. Many of us are unaware of things that are unseen that affect our lives in ways that we don't realize. The Bible is very clear throughout that there is more to this world than what is seen with the naked eye. There is a spiritual realm that is just as real as the world we live in; I believe it to be more real than what is seen. This world is just temporary and passing, a shadow of things to come. There are things that are unseen that are happening around us all the time, which are eternal.

In the Old Testament book of 2 Kings there is a story of a king reigning in Aram who was angry because it seemed as though his actions and intentions were somehow being made clear to the armies of Israel.

He could not understand how the armies of Israel knew everything he was doing, anything he plotted. (2 Kings 6:8-10). Elisha, the man of God, lived his life in such a way that he was able, by the Spirit of God, to know the very words that the King of Aram spoke in secret to his generals (2 Kings 6:11-12). God was revealing these things to Elisha, who was very aware of the unseen realms, and who had an intimate and powerful prayer life, which gave him this special insight. This so enraged the king of Aram that he sent his army to the town where Elisha lived, hoping to kill or capture him:

¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. ¹⁶ “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them” ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, “Strike these people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked (2 Kings 6:14-18).

When Elisha’s servant looked at the size of the army of Aram around and about the city, he began to lose heart. Things looked hopeless when seen only from an earthly perspective. But all was not as it seemed. There were spiritual forces around Elisha and Gehazi, the servant, which the young novice to the things of God was unaware of. Elisha prayed for his servant’s eyes to be opened to the unseen spiritual realm around them. All of a sudden, at the prayer of Elisha, he saw beyond this physical world to the reality of the spiritual forces of God that were previously hidden from him, angelic beings that were much more powerful than the army of Aram. He saw the armies of heaven protecting and surrounding the prophet of God, available to serve him in whatever way the prophet prayed. The enemies of Israel were defeated with one display of God’s power at the prayer of Elisha. We too, as servants of the Living God, have angelic hosts that protect us.

¹⁴ Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

How much do we avail ourselves of heaven’s

help when we are in need? The word of God is very clear that angels are sent by God to serve us even before we come to faith in Christ. Notice that the scripture is written in the future tense. Angels are sent to help and protect us who will inherit salvation. That means that God is working on our behalf even before we make the choice to follow Him. In fact, even when we are babies scripture indicates that we have an unseen protector that watches over us:

¹⁰ “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven (Matthew 18:10).

It is not the angels we pray to, we trust in God from whom the angelic beings take their direction. It is faith that connects us to this unseen realm, just as it is faith that opened the servant’s eyes and faith that caused Elisha to reach out to God in prayer.

Have you ever had that feeling that something invisible was protecting you through something that you experienced? Talk to one another and share any stories that you may have.

Many Christians are just like Elisha’s servant; unaware of God’s power and presence. Our worldview in the West has no room for the supernatural; for the most part we are oblivious to angelic beings and demonic spirits in the unseen realm. How many times do we miss seeing God’s power displayed and Satan’s kingdom displaced because we do not reach out to God in prayer and believe Him for His divine resources and intervention, bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth? Although God is sovereign and all powerful, he chooses to act in partnership with His people through prayer.

Brian Gough, an old friend of mine from Harwich in Essex, England, before he came to Christ, used to be involved in spiritual things of an occult nature. He was ignorant to the dangers that he was inviting into his home. His family began to hear voices and see spirits in their home. His children became accustomed to seeing these spirits who they referred to as spirit guides. The family knew the spirits by name. They were deceived into believing that ‘white magic’ was harmless until one night all hell broke loose and demons started to manifest to them. They were frightened and realized that they were involved with something very dark, not at all harmless. The things that they saw and heard in their

home horrified all of them. This went on all day until Brian looked up the address of the local evangelical pastor, Harry Hughes, and started walking to his house for help. On the way, he heard audible voices telling him, “you go to his house and we will kill you all.” Concerned for the safety of his family, Brian ignored the threatening voices and went and saw Harry Hughes. Harry came and cleansed his house, praying and taking authority over every evil spirit in the house, and removing every occult token there. He then led the family in prayers of repentance, renouncing every evil hold that the enemy had on his family, dedicating his home to the worship of God and His Word. When Brian and his family committed their lives to Christ and repented and forsook all involvement in the occult, their lives were completely renewed. No demonic activity occurred in their house from that moment on.

Have you ever had a supernatural experience when you sensed great evil? How did you respond?

How far can Satan go in his attacks against us?

God has given us protection. There is a natural ‘fence or hedge’ (Job 1:10), a barrier that keeps the enemy from making inroads into our lives:

⁶ One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. ⁷ The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.” ⁸ Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” ⁹ “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. ¹⁰ ***“Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*** ¹² The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger” (Job 1:6-12 Emphasis mine).

In Job’s case, Satan wanted to destroy his testimony of God’s faithfulness, and for reasons we do not understand, God, in His sovereign plan, allowed the hedge of protection to be removed and allowed Satan to attack Job. The enemy strategizes as to how he can break down that natural barrier that protects our

soul from bondage and servitude to demonic forces. When we play around with the occult, for instance, this ‘hedge’ is gradually eroded or cut back and one can see and experience things that are not normally seen. The enemy, Satan, gives occult power to those who are obedient to his whim. Occult power can be attractive to those seeking such things, but it never comes without a price. Every form of occult power also comes with a hook in it ensnaring one to satanic bondage. When ground is given to the enemy to do his will, oppression and darkness are always the results. Drugs are another means of eroding that barrier so that one can experience alternate states of reality. Satan never gives away such experiences without bringing us closer to him. God, by His Spirit, also enables His people to move in supernatural power if we are open to be used of Him in such a way, but when God moves His people to act under His power it is never against our will. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is always liberty and freedom, unlike the enemy. God enables His people to see what He is doing and step out in faith, just as Paul did after preaching the word of God in Lystra:

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk (Acts 14:8-10).

Chip Ingram, author of a book called “The Invisible War,” states; “There is a visible and an invisible world that intersect, and we live in that intersection.” Sometimes, when people are sick, they may see things in the unseen realm. Often when a person is dying there are accounts of people and things that they see on the other side.

Have you ever been by the bedside of a loved one that saw something in the unseen realm, or have you heard a story of someone who saw something supernatural?

Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, the evil leader of Russia from 1922-1953, accompanied her father at death’s door and said that she would never sit alongside an unbeliever who was dying again. She said that he went into hell kicking and screaming. Voltaire was said to have died crying out in torment. Speaking for those who do know God, C.M. Ward said, “No Christian has ever been known to recant on his death

bed.”

Paul the Apostle saw and experienced a number of supernatural occurrences as he walked as a Spirit-led believer in Christ. One such experience he tells us about:

¹ “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - ⁴ how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.” (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

What things can we learn from the above passage of scripture concerning the unseen realm?

Paul is talking about something that he himself witnessed. He declares that he doesn't even know if he was in his body at the time when he was caught up (Greek word is *harpazō* which literally means to be snatched up. We use the word rapture, or caught up, to describe being snatched away from the body, this word is also used in the classic rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Paul states that he was taken to the third heaven, or Paradise. This obviously raises a big question, if the abode of God is in the third heaven, where are the first and second heavens? What goes on there?

I personally do not believe that the third heaven is in some distant galaxy. I do not believe that heaven is in any way a physical place such as earth. Some say that the first heaven is the physical heavens of the galaxies, stars and planets, and that the second heaven is the spiritual unseen world that intersects with our planet. There is no way of proving this point purely from scripture. However, what is clear is that there is an unseen realm that is beyond the physical senses, call it the first or second heaven, I think it is sufficient to understand it is a heavenly realm. It also shows us that there is a divine order in the spiritual world, just as earthly armies have an earthly order, the spiritual forces have a hierarchy and order in the spiritual realms.

In another place, Paul writes to the church at

Ephesus, warning of a spirit being called the prince of the power of the air:

¹ “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Who is the ‘prince of the power of the air? Why do you think he is called this?

Satan is the one referred to as a spirit with the rank of a prince inhabiting a spiritual dimension of power in “the air”, an atmosphere or realm in which he is active. We can logically assume that Paul is talking about the unseen world from where Satan is doing his work of deceiving man. Some believe that Satan inhabits a place called hell, but this is not correct according to the Bible. Revelation 12:7-13 tells us of a time that in the future where there will be a war in heaven which Satan will lose and be cast onto Earth. The context of the passage indicates that he has been accusing us before God up until this point, which tallies with the passage in Job which we read earlier. This spiritual realm is the venue of a spiritual battle between God's angelic beings and Satan's demons and princes. The battle is for supremacy over the Earth and over each individual person that is born on the planet. There is a war going on for your very soul. Satan wants to keep us in the dark as to his work in trying to destroy your soul life. He would rather that we be ignorant that there is such a battle going on. His work goes unhindered if man is unaware of his schemes. He therefore seeks to keep you in the dark as to the fact that there is a spiritual realm, a heaven and a hell at all. He would rather that we wait and find out when we die or are raptured to God's presence.

The English author, C.S. Lewis wrote a book entitled “The Screwtape Letters.” In this imaginative book, he speaks in first person as if he is a senior devil, named Screwtape, who has been given the task of training a junior devil named Wormwood. In the preface of his book he writes; “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our (human*) race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist and a magician

with the same delight.” Elsewhere, as the character Screwtape, in writing to the junior devil Wormwood, he writes;

“I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered by the high command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course this has not always been so. We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence, we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics.I do not think that you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.”¹

For those that are not believers, Satan would seek by all means possible to keep them from receiving and ultimately responding to God’s word by believing the gospel. Satan seeks to blind those of us that are Christians, so that we do not see the power and authority that we have been given by God to overcome all the power of the enemy (Mark 16:17-18). Scripture calls Satan the god of this age:

⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Satan has many strategies of keeping you blinded to the gospel and to the working of God’s power in you and through you to touch this world. We choose by our actions who we listen to and obey, Satan or the Lord. If we continue to listen to Satan’s voice, with his doubts and unbelief, we will not live fruitful lives for God on this Earth.

The Unseen Realm is also a place where God’s angels are at work.

Balaam was a man who had an ability to move

in the spiritual realm and place a curse on people. When the Israelite people were travelling from Egypt to the land that God had given them they had to pass through the territory of Balak, Moab’s king. Balak was afraid he would lose any battle against Israel due to the Israelites easy victory over the Amorites, so he sent for Balaam, the seer, to curse Israel so that he could overcome them. God told Balaam not to go at first, but Balaam would not hear the word no. He had been so tempted by the promise of great reward that he saddled his donkey to travel to prophesy and curse God’s people (2 Peter 2:15). His actions so angered the Lord that He sent an angel to cut off his head:

²⁶ Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat her with his staff. ²⁸ Then the LORD opened the donkey’s mouth, and she said to Balaam, “What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?” ²⁹ Balaam answered the donkey, “You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.” ³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, “Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?” “No,” he said. ³¹ Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown (Numbers 22:26-31).

Balaam here was oblivious to what his donkey was doing in saving his life. God showed him how dangerous Balaam’s way had become. His heart was so lusting after financial reward that he had become willing to be used of God’s enemies to fix a curse on the Israelite people. God opened his eyes to the spiritual realm where an angel had been waiting to take off his head. Even then, God was gracious in allowing his donkey to talk to Balaam about how treacherous his heart had become. Often, like Balaam, we go headlong into situations in ministry or work where there are unseen spiritual forces at work and if we are not sensitive spiritually to God, we can be influenced by demonic forces. In this instance, the Lord had mercy on Balaam and opened up his donkey’s mouth to warn him that his way was a reckless one before God. Wouldn’t you like to have been a fly on that wall watching this spectacle! This is another example of something happening in the unseen realm that humans (Balaam) was completely

¹ The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis, Published by Harper, San Francisco, p. 31.

unaware of. It is interesting to note that the donkey was more aware of the unseen realm than Balaam was. I'm sure all of us that have a dog or a cat have noticed them looking around the room looking at something that is unseen. Animals have been known to sense a spiritual presence. It is very possible that they are looking at angels that continually watch over us that are walking with the Lord.

⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them (Psalm 34:7).

Concerning having our eyes opened to the unseen realm, Paul the apostle has a similar thing to say to God's people. Writing to the church at Ephesus, he says:

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19).

What do you think Paul is talking about when he states that the prayer he prays for the Ephesians is for the eyes of their heart to be enlightened as to who they are in Christ and their divine resources?

I personally don't believe that Paul is praying that all the believers at Ephesus would have their eyes opened like Balaam or Gehazi, Elisha's servant. This is about the eyes of the heart. It is possible through drugs, sickness and other things to have ones eyes opened to see into the spiritual realm yet still not have the eyes of their heart open. The eyes of the heart speak of seeing the world the way God sees the world, lost and in need of Christ. There is a need for the Church of Jesus Christ to have minds awakened to a biblical worldview and not to believe the lies we are told by secularists who say that there is no God and that there is no spiritual warfare on planet Earth. It would be a scary thing to have our eyes opened to the spiritual world all the time. God protects us from being distracted by seeing into the spiritual realm. Those of us that are born again of God's Spirit are told that God's incomparable great power is available for us to use under God's direction and guid-

ance. Why do we not see more of God's power working in the people of God? James say's that, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). God waits and longs for His church to move in more of His power, this is what Satan fears more than anything—the church availing herself of the power available to us in prayer.

How does the unseen spiritual realm affect us?

We need to have a heart that is sensitive to be moved and directed by God as we go about our daily lives. It is so easy to react to situations in a worldly way rather than asking God as to what He is doing. In these days where there is so much occult and demonic activity, we are to listen to the Father. Jesus said, "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me" (John 6:45). It is possible, even in our noisy world, to listen to what the Father says and learn from Him. When God speaks to our hearts it always aligns with His word. Jesus was our model in all things. He said:

¹⁹ "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does (John 5:19).

Jesus modeled to us a life laid down to the Father, living in obedience to His will and seeking to be a blessing to those around us. That's why He could say,

¹² "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

Our difficulty is in knowing and seeing what God is doing in us and around us. The more we can grow in our dependency on God and His word and Spirit, the more we can overcome what the enemy is seeking to do in our lives, our families and neighborhoods.

The enemy's chief tactics against us is deception and temptation to sin. We must choose whose voice we will listen to and obey; Satan's or Christ's. Our God has made it clear that we will have trouble and difficulty as we walk our lives out in spiritual warfare with an enemy that seeks to destroy us, but He has also reminded us that Satan is a defeated foe:

³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Where was Satan defeated? At the cross of Christ! What Satan thought was his greatest victory in taking Christ to the cross was his greatest defeat. He who knew no sin became sin in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ's substitutionary death on the cross was for us and as us, that we sinful human beings might become the righteousness of God. By our faith in Christ we have entered into His victory over Satan. John the Apostle wrote, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). We that belong to Christ are no longer held in bondage to Satan and sin. We are delivered and set free from servitude to dark spiritual forces that are unseen. Paul the Apostle writes, "For he (God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the

Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13). There is an unseen world that intersects with this world but we that belong to Christ are no longer under Satan's dominion—Christ has overcome him at the Cross. What a triumph, what a Savior! "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! **And I hold the keys of death and Hades** (Revelation 1:18 Emphasis mine). Let that soak into your spirit!

Prayer: Father, I pray that I may have a greater awareness of what you are doing on planet Earth. Let the way I view the world be according to the lens of Your Word and don't let me be influenced by unseen evil forces that seek my fall. Let Your kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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