

3. Know Your Enemy

Spiritual Warfare: Overcoming Evil

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We have already established that there is an unseen world that exists whether we see it or not, whether we are awake to it or not, and whether we acknowledge it or not. It is a spiritual world. There is the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. In this study, we examine the very real spiritual battle in which we find ourselves and uncover the enemy's schemes, as well as recognize God the Father's provision. By understanding these truths, we can stand against the schemes of the evil one.

When World War One broke out, the War Ministry in London, England, sent a coded message to one of the British outposts in the remote areas of British-controlled Africa, saying, "War declared; arrest all enemy aliens in your district." A prompt reply came back, "We have arrested ten Germans, six Belgians, four Frenchmen, two Italians, three Austrians, and an American. Please advise immediately whom we are at war with!"

In this study, we will examine how demonic forces wage war against the Church and how we can prepare ourselves to battle in the heavenly realms. In fact, did you know that you are already doing battle with every simple act of obedience to Christ and with every spiritual discipline and prayer you offer up to God? When we understand the enemy's schemes and battle plans, we can overcome his strategies through discernment and the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter warns us, saying:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

In the book *The Art of War*, authored by Sun Tzu, it is stated, "If you know your enemy and you know yourself, you need not fear the results of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, you will suffer a defeat for every victory gained. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." If that holds true for earthly wars, the spiritual battle involving every Christian is even more relevant.

Spiritual Warfare

In the last two studies of this series, we observed very real unseen enemies at work on Earth, striving for supremacy and control over the minds of men. We also began to understand who we are and the authority and power God has granted us through the cross of Christ. The Lord has not left us unequipped for this battle; He has provided us with everything we need to take our place in the fight and achieve victory against our foe. As believers in Christ, we are called to wage war against the enemy, regardless of whether we see ourselves as spiritual warriors. If we are to fulfill the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations, we will face opposition. Although there are different gifts and callings in the Body of Christ, all believers have been enlisted to fight in this cosmic conflict and are called to be overcomers. Each of us has a role to play in this cosmic drama.

³For though we live in the world, **we do not wage war as the world does.** ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they **have divine power to demolish strongholds.** ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

We, the Church, have been given spiritual weapons. These weapons are neither swords nor pistols; they are not of this world. We cannot wage a spiritual war against unseen entities with earthly weapons. Our spiritual weapons hold divine power to demolish the strongholds and fortifications of the enemy. Paul the Apostle wrote about those walking with Jesus as actively advancing on these “strongholds.” These strongholds can be likened to worldly ideals that oppose the Word of God. Empowered by our God, the Church is undeterred by seemingly impregnable walls or the size and power of the enemy. We have one distinct advantage: we know the end of the story. We understand how this battle will unfold, for we are told that:

...at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

Let’s uncover some of these “strongholds of the mind.” What are they? They represent the various philosophies of thought established by our adversary. There are systems of thinking that we have grown up with and that surround us, which are contrary to the Gospel, regardless of the country in which we reside.

Where are these strongholds? In 1970, cartoonist Walt Kelly famously created a poster with the slogan, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” If we are unaware of the battle in our minds, it will be difficult to stand against our enemy. Be mindful of your thought life. “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23). Your heart, representing the central core of your inner life and spirit, is protected by your mind. Be wary of the images that Satan seeks to sow in the fertile soil of your heart. Take captive every thought that arises in opposition to the truth of God’s Word. This is particularly relevant when we consider the times we live in and how media pervades our daily lives to such an extent that it is hard to avoid it! We need to be alert, now more than ever, to the subtle messages fed to us through the power of various media. Be heavenly-minded and align your thinking with Scripture. Think of yourself as a citizen of heaven, for that is what you are.

The Hierarchy of Evil

Inhabiting this unseen spiritual realm that intersects with Earth are at least four distinct categories of spiritual beings engaged in conflict against God’s creation and kingdom. The apostle Paul wrote about these invisible evil forces:

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of

this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Paul was careful to ensure that the Church is fully aware of whom we are fighting against. He tells us about four categories of evil beings. First and foremost, he states that we must stand against the devil's schemes or methods (v. 11). We can use the metaphor of American football, where the coach stands beside the field with his playbook. Through his hierarchy of evil, Satan tries different tactics against each of us, although we should refrain from calling them "plays." There is nothing playful about the enemy's strategies and schemes. He observes how you navigate your faith and strategizes his attacks based on what he perceives as your weaknesses in those areas.

There is a fable that Satan's agents were failing in their various attempts to entice a holy man living as a hermit in the desert of Northern Africa into sin. Every effort against him met with failure, so Satan, angered by the incompetence of his subordinates, became personally involved in the matter. He said, "The reason you have failed is that your methods are too crude for someone like this. Watch this." He then approached the holy man with great care and whispered in his ear, "Your brother was just made Bishop of Alexandria." Instantly, the holy man's face revealed that Satan had been successful: a great scowl formed over his mouth, and his eyes tightened. "Envy," said Satan, "is often our best weapon against those who seek holiness."

Please do not underestimate the knowledge that he, his evil angels, and demons have gained over thousands of years while observing people in their daily lives. He understands how the human mind works. Remember, Satan is not confined to a normal lifespan of seventy years; he has been engaged in this from the very beginning.

The word translated into English as "struggle" (v. 12) is the Greek word *palē* which means to wrestle, swaying back and forth. It conveys the idea of two individuals in hand-to-hand combat, each trying different maneuvers to pin the other into submission. Paul states that our struggle or wrestling is not against flesh and blood; people are never our enemy. The enemy may use people against us when given the opportunity, but a Christian cannot retaliate against that person. We do not fight against flesh and blood; instead, our battle is against unseen spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. Being aware of these truths is essential for us to combat them effectively. Your brother or sister is never your enemy in the church; recognize opposition for what it is. The actual battle is with the enemy of our souls. The Lord will provide you with the strategy to overcome evil with good. Ask God for His plan.

John the Apostle wrote:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

I interpret that Scripture as indicating that Satan has so organized his evil forces that countries, regions, towns, villages, and even individuals have a certain enemy presence at work to control what occurs under each enemy sphere of influence. In discussing the entire world under Satan's control, John the Apostle refers to the world system established by Satan in opposition to God.

Those who walk with Christ are liberated from enemy authority and control (Colossians 1:13). The only way he can influence us is through lies and deception, provided we allow it. To help us in this struggle, Paul the Apostle wrote a letter in the Greek language to the church at Ephesus, so let's examine the Greek words he used to describe the four categories of evil mentioned in Ephesians 6:12:

Paul's Four Categories of Evil Spirits

1) The Rulers. The Greek word used by Paul is *Archē*. This term refers to principalities or chief rulers and denotes evil beings of the highest rank in Satan's kingdom. It also implies a beginning—possibly referring to those evil angels that colluded with Satan at the onset of his rebellion against God. These spiritual rulers likely confer with Satan himself and govern nations and geographical territories to achieve the goals of God's enemies. The Book of Daniel provides an example of an evil spiritual prince who ruled over the entire territory of Persia. I believe that every nation has an evil prince like the one mentioned.

The context of the passage involves an angel of God sent to the prophet Daniel to help him understand a revelation given to the nation of Israel (Daniel 10:1). Daniel devoted time to partial fasting and prayer for twenty-one days while seeking the Lord for insight into the vision mentioned in chapter eleven. An evil spiritual ruler known as the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted and delayed the angel's response to Daniel's prayer for clarity concerning the vision. Ultimately, the good angel reaches Daniel and speaks to him:

¹²Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. ¹³But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13).

This passage of Scripture indicates that an evil spiritual being of princely rank delayed an answer to prayer. Have you ever experienced a delay in response to your prayers? How did you persevere? Please share your thoughts and examples.

The Scripture states that the evil prince's dominion was over the geographical area of Persia, now known as Iran. Only after the archangel Michael intervened was the angel able to reach Daniel with the message he had been waiting for. Since the cross and the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, the Church has received the authority to resist and oppose evil spiritual forces through our cooperation with God in prayer. There are still spiritual forces at work in the world today, striving to exercise control through thoughts, philosophies, and religious beliefs.

Certainly, not every instance of a delayed answer to prayer results from spiritual warfare. At times, the answer may simply be to wait. God also develops our character when our faith is tested. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to miss out on the blessing of answered prayer if we give up before achieving a breakthrough.

2) The Authorities. The Greek word is *Exousia*, which means authority. It signifies delegated authority from higher up the chain of command (Matthew 8:9). It refers to a spirit that has been granted permission, capability, right, and authority to act. There is an order and chain of command in the spiritual realm, just as there is in the natural realm, using the analogy of an army. The enemy directs his generals on the battlefield and gives orders to those fighting on the ground. These evil spirits receive their orders from those high in Satan's chain of command. An "authority" could be a spirit that influences a city where a collective group of people has surrendered to a specific deception or sin. An evil spirit, "authority," wields its power over a region or city based on the consent of many people who accept the manifestation of a particular sin.

Certain cities are recognized for their historical connection to sin, which becomes a stronghold in that location. For instance, some cities are infamous for mobster violence and have high crime rates, making them geographical strongholds. One such city has been labeled the "murder capital of America" and is also known as the "Windy City," notorious for a high incidence of violent crimes. We can observe various "strongholds" in certain cities, such as those related to greed, pornography, or religious deception. A potent spirit like this may also be termed a "principality." It is prudent for the church in any city or town to explore the origins and historical sins of that area. This understanding can enhance our approach in addressing the spirit over a particular region. Seeking God's wisdom and guidance is essential to dismantle the stronghold or spiritual fortification that characterizes the city. Merely praying against a spirit is insufficient; effective spiritual warfare involves taking actions that counteract the manifestations of the evil spirit's influence. Our actions contribute significantly to the battle. Through simple obedience, we engage in the good fight when we live our lives in opposition to the flow of the evil one. Let's now examine the third category Paul mentions:

3) The Powers of this Dark World. This phrase includes the Greek word *Kosmokratōr*. The first part of the word is *kosmos*, translated into English as "world." The second half is *krateō*, which means "to hold." It conveys the idea of "world holders of this dark world." The imagery depicts evil spirits that keep the physical world in the grip of darkness through an assault on the mind. I believe that Satan has assigned these spirits authority over belief systems that bind people's minds through false philosophies to bring an individual under demonic control. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

How do you think these spirits manifest on Earth? What examples do you see?

These spirits promote belief systems such as religious cults, materialism, and Secular Humanism, to name just a few. They influence national cultures, such as the gaming industry, driving young people ever deeper into darkness and keeping them from living a full life. Many movies today are coming out that are full of darkness, horror, and fear. The music industry also plays a role; one doesn't need to search extensively on Google or YouTube to find examples of musicians who have openly admitted to selling their souls to the evil one for success and fame. This category would also include religious spirits that are incredibly powerful and deceptive. They keep many people worldwide in bondage, attempting to please God through religious works. Paul elaborated on the influence of these spirits, the dark world powers, in his second letter to the church at Corinth:

The 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 himself (the God of this age) is accused of blinding people's minds, but I tend to believe that he directs the powers of this dark world to influence those minds. Let's now look at the fourth category:

4) The Spiritual Forces of Evil in the Heavenly Realms. We can compare these spirits to basic demonic foot soldiers of various lower ranks that oppose and obstruct men and women from searching for and discovering the truth in this world. These demons target unbelievers as well as hinder the spiritual growth of God's people after they commit their lives to Christ. The principal weapon of these forces of evil is to sow destructive thoughts in the fertile ground of people's minds. If we allow them to, negative thoughts can germinate and grow into attitudes and habits that enslave people and bring them into bondage to Satan. If you have ever desired to be a warrior for God, don't be surprised if Satan employs strategies to weaken your potential and hinder your walk before you can run for God. Be strong in the power of God's might, not your own—pray through every opposition to your growth in Christ. Be diligent in the things of God.

Some attacks may be more than mere thoughts; they can delve deeper into oppression. A wise person once said, "You cannot stop the birds of the air from flying about your head, but you can prevent them from making a nest in your hair." If we indulge in these thoughts and dwell on them, they can manifest as feelings such as depression, discouragement, frustration, bitterness, and resentment, among many others. You may notice that the enemy's strategies of attack against you may evolve as you grow older and more mature in Christ. In my early days as a Christian, the enemy would plant a thought like, "You don't really believe in God, do you?" However, as I matured, that thought ceased to appear, for the enemy realized he was wasting his time sowing that seed. Now, I am not saying that I never have doubts, but the enemy has had to find different tactics to use. As we grow in Christ, the temptations we face may change, but God's grace to face these temptations and overcome them will never change. We can be assured of that. Paul wrote that God would always provide a way of escape from whatever temptation we face:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man, and God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Are you aware of spiritual warfare in your Christian life? How have you effectively overcome negative thoughts?

A Disarmed Enemy

You may not realize that you are in a battle but let me assure you that if you are a disciple of Christ seeking to fulfill God's will on Earth, you are engaged in a fight whether you like it or not (2 Timothy 3:12). Some expositors believe that Revelation 12:4 suggests that Satan has persuaded a third of the stars of heaven to join his side. The belief is that these stars represent angelic beings. I am not sure if that interpretation is correct, but I believe that many spiritual

beings, both good and evil, occupy the unseen realm. Those that are evil are organized specifically to inflict maximum damage on the Kingdom of God. We need not fear these demons and evil spirits sent against us, for Christ has triumphed over them through the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

The Word of God is clear about the power and authority of those who are born again of the Spirit. The Scripture states, **“The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4)**. Who is in us? Christ Jesus took up residence in our hearts when we received the gift of eternal life. In a later session, we will examine the authority and power that Christ has given us to disrupt the plans of the evil one. **“I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19)**. Peter assures us in his first letter that Christ has conquered all the enemy's power and sat down alongside the Father in the throne room, with enemy powers under His feet:

Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him (1 Peter 3:22; emphasis added).

Good angels were already subject to Him before His victory at Calvary's cross. The angels mentioned in the previous passage are evil beings made subject to Christ. We have learned that this world is under the control of Satan and that our enemy influences events by manipulating flesh and blood individuals. What is the Church to do against such forces? In a way that I cannot fully explain, you and I, as Christians, are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ, even while we walk on this Earth. Christ sits far above every authority, power, and dominion on the throne. Because of our relationship with Christ, we are also seated with Him, exercising His authority in the world through prayer. Paul clarifies this position of authority with the following words:

¹⁸I 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, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and **seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms**, ²¹**far above all rule and authority, power and dominion**, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And **God placed all things under his feet** and appointed him to be head over everything for **the church**, ²³**which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:18-23).

⁶And **God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus**, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6-7).

How do we become a formidable force in the kingdom of God? We know that we have been given authority in Christ and the powerful weapon of prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. However, to be effective, we need to understand some fundamental principles.

1) Know who you are in Christ. Are you convinced of the authority of Christ? Don't try and wage warfare in your strength. Rely on His power and take direction from the Holy Spirit.

2) Embrace the Word of God. In this world, it is becoming increasingly unpopular to align with the Word of God. Jesus overcame temptation by declaring God's word. The Word of God is unwavering and unchanging. The truths found in God's Word should shape our thoughts and decisions. By learning the truths in God's Word and applying them, you will position yourself on the right side of the spiritual conflict, regardless of others' opinions of you. God's Word is powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). We will discuss this further later.

3) Agree with the Holy Spirit quickly. Every time you exercise self-control, instead of losing your temper, you engage with your enemy. Every time you choose to forgive rather than harbor bitterness, a battle is fought and won. Whenever you decide to prioritize others' needs over your own and make unselfish choices, you train yourself for battle and become a formidable warrior. You cannot fight the enemy while giving him ground in your own life, but if you are aware of the battle and submit to the Lordship of Christ, you will enhance your ability and effectiveness to exercise Christ's authority and witness the Kingdom of God made manifest in our world.

4) Prayer and Fasting—The Holy Spirit will teach you how to pull down strongholds. This was the way Jesus lived His life on earth, in direct communion with the Father and in agreement with His will in every situation. Your faith will grow as you develop a prayer life. We will examine the topic of prayer in more depth later in this study.

5) See the Possibilities. What areas of your life do you perceive the enemy infiltrating? Do you need to be more proactive in this spiritual battle for your family members or friends? The enemy would have us believe that we must accept things as they are, but if we view situations from God's perspective and align with His Word, we can begin to confront these circumstances! Do not accept defeat; instead, allow God to expand your vision of what He desires to accomplish in your life! Ask God to help you recognize the possibilities and exercise your faith in Him and His Word to witness a change in your own life, your family, and beyond. The forward progression of God's will and purpose is a form of warfare, and God is on your side! Every time you draw near to the front lines in prayer, you are engaging in this spiritual battle. The wonderful thing is that we can declare the victory Christ has already achieved on our behalf. If God is with us, who can stand against us?

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for Christ's sacrifice on the cross that has delivered me from Satan's dominion. Grant me an increased awareness of the power and authority I possess to overcome. Help me to view myself as You see me and to see others as You see them. Your kingdom come, and Your will be done. Amen.

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com