

Over the past two weeks we have been looking at the concept of Spiritual Warfare.

In week one, we surveyed briefly the spiritual war that Jesus fought, as introduced to us in the first three chapters of Mark. In Mark 1, the “Kingdom of God” is preached and then demonstrated by Jesus via the casting out of demons, healing the sick, welcoming the unrighteous and unworthy to eat with Him, and by the forgiveness of sins. In Mark 3, Jesus tells the disciples that they too have authority in Him to preach this good news and cast out demons (likewise when he sends out the 72 in Luke 10). Finally, Jesus teaches at the end of Mark 3 that He has come to “bind the strong man” and plunder His house. This is language of conflict: the Kingdom of God is a kingdom that is at war against the kingdom of the enemy. The good news, as Rev 12 tells us, is that this is a war the enemy has already lost, though he is not yet destroyed. He has been cast down, and we, the body of Christ, can triumph over him “by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony.” While there are battles yet to be fought before the war is finally over, we have authority in Christ to resist the devil whenever he comes against us, and power to stand our ground. In order to gain a better understanding of this authority and power, we explored Eph 6:10-18, which describes the armour - the identity and status we have in Christ - that God has given us to use in this war, so that we can “be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.”

In week 2 we focussed on Luke 11:14-22, the story of Jesus casting out a mute demon, which was followed by Jesus again teaching that He had come to “bind the strong man and plunder his house.” This second message addressed some of the questions that arose out of the preaching from week one, in particular: the question of how we *do* spiritual warfare.

In reference to *War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation* by Vernard Eller, we explored the idea that humans were created to have “dominion” and to guard (protect, keep watch over) the creation against an enemy who is opposed to the will of God (see Genesis 2:15). We are made in the image of God who is a ferocious protector of what is precious to Him. God is a warrior. Thus, we are also designed with a fighter instinct. However, instead of guarding the world against the enemy, we succumbed to his temptations and handed over to him the authority of dominion entrusted to us by God. This is why, when Jesus was tempted in the desert, Jesus does not contradict Satan when he claims to have in his possession “all the kingdoms of the world.”

One of the main results of our fall into deception and sin was that we immediately turned against one another. We misdirected our fighting instinct and began to act violently toward one another, instead of against the true “enemy of our souls.”

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul writes: “For 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.”

A verse like this, if we are to take it seriously, requires that we acknowledge there are evil powers working against us that are not made of flesh and blood, and that these

powers are our true enemy. If we are not convinced that they are real, our fighting impulse will always be turned from these powers onto people, and we will instinctively see people as the problem.

- Instead of fighting the **powers that fuel violence by loving our enemies**, we start hating our enemies and justifying violence against them.
- Instead of fighting the **powers that fuel legalism by loving the self-righteous**, we start despising them and judging them.
- Instead of fighting the **powers that bring about heresy and division**, we start hating those we think are heretics, which throughout history, has often turned violent.
- Instead of revolting against the **powers that fuel racism** by loving people of all races and loving racists, we start hating the racist, and so become like them.

In each of these cases, if we do not fight the powers by loving those ensnared by them, then we only end up fueling the powers and becoming like them in our hatred or mis-directed anger. Until we're convinced that the powers are real, we won't be motivated to live the radical life of a soldier at war, because we don't really believe there is a war. And we'll be inclined to direct our warrior instinct against the **WRONG ENEMY**. We'll be inclined to fight people with violent words, attitudes and behaviors rather than with prayer and love.

It is vital that we approach our warfare with an attitude of love and compassion toward people, seeking reconciliation and peace with them wherever possible. Otherwise we run the risk of giving the devil a foothold in our lives to deceive and oppress us, which may cause us to act in ways that are incompatible with the love of Christ. If we can approach warfare with compassion for people, yet with aggression toward the true enemy, then we are in a position to be used by Christ to potentially bring deliverance to those who are oppressed. In other words, the hard work of loving our neighbour is an essential element to spiritual warfare in terms of resisting the devil. The two go hand in hand, as they clearly did in the ministry of Christ.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you from the story in Luke 11? What is the "house" Jesus refers to?
- Read Ephesians 6 - what are the elements of our armour and how do we use them?
- Why do we need to recognize the reality of the realm of "the powers" in order to fight the right enemy?
- How do you personally respond to the teaching that there is a spiritual reality that is as real as our physical reality?
- In what ways do you need to change your response to people who participate in patterns of life that align with Satan's way of doing things?
- How can you better respond with love for these people?
- What do you think "resisting the devil" means?
- Why is seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with people we have offended or who have hurt/offended us, so important? Why is this just as much an act of "spiritual warfare" as say, healing the sick or casting out a demon?
- Are there people in your life you need to forgive or be reconciled with?