

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 6:10-13 - Spiritual Warfare - Part 1

We are rounding the corner in Ephesians and on this final stretch before the end. And Paul brings us to a familiar passage on the Armor of God. Many of you know the armor of God, maybe you've seen depictions of it or memorized it. You know that there's only one offensive weapon in the armor of God - what's that? The sword of the Spirit.

The armor of God is essential in the Christian life. I think most of us would nod in agreement with that. But why is it essential? And I think the reason it is essential is actually because of the 4 verses that come before it.

Look at **Vs. 13** for a second. **Read**

Alright, so the classic preacher question: what is the therefore...there for?

The command to take up the full armor of God is in response to verses 10-12. And the thrust of how relentless and all pervasive demonic, satanic activity is.

So I want to unpack this little section here.

Big Picture: A lot of the problems we face in life are demonic in nature.

That's not meant to scare anyone, that's not meant for us to claim that every problem or ailment is "the devil made me do it." The reality is that there is a spiritual world all around us and we know very little about it except for what we know from the Scriptures.

Now, what we have in the Bible is sufficient for us to live a life faithful to God. He's told us exactly what we need to know to operate with this parallel spiritual world. But I think what the Bible describes is probably just the tip of the iceberg of the totality of the spiritual world.

And because it's the tip of the iceberg that can lead to a couple problems. On the one hand, some people don't say hardly anything at all about satanic activity. I think our camp - reformed, conservative - is often very reluctant to attribute things to the devil or evil spirits or demons. That makes us uncomfortable.

On the other side are those who speculate too much about the unseen spiritual world. Frank Perretti and CS Lewis and others added to that. I know some of you guys listen to Haunted Cosmos. I just want to caution you that especially in this discussion there's a lot of speculation that functionally becomes fact in our minds.

We need to be really careful. One of the giveaways of false teachers is that they blaspheme the glorious ones - spiritual beings. False teachers speculate and dabble in the spiritual world too much. We need to be careful to not go beyond what is written in the Word of God when it comes to spiritual beings.

So what I want to do this morning is take this opportunity to talk about the spiritual world. By the way, when I'm at camp and do cabin devotions, this is easily the most popular topic kids ask about. Angels, demons, Satan, the unseen world - so most of us are somewhat interested.

First, let me talk about the errors I just mentioned. The first side is that often in conservative reformed camps we just don't talk about these things at all. We don't talk about demons or Satan or how they might influence our lives.

If you're at a park in downtown Spokane and a homeless guy comes walking through, you just kind of ignore him and go the other way. It's awkward and weird - that's how we often treat spiritual beings: demons and Satan and angels.

We might quote **1 Pet 5:8**: Be sober-minded; be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

We'll quote this in vague kind of ways that the devil is out there somewhere and has some kind of control. But if we're honest we don't really believe he's near us. I've heard preachers say that since the devil isn't omnipresent - he's only in 1 place at 1 time - he's probably just working on the most important people. Almost as a way to downplay the devil's role. I think that's dangerous because Peter tells us he's looking to eat us. Foolish and out of control people are exactly who the devil preys on. So we better be sober-minded and self-controlled

The devil attacks Christians through subtle ways of temptation. He hides as an angel of light **2 Cor. 11:14-15** so that there's often an element of goodness in his work, but in the end it's rotten.

Paul says Satan hindered his ability to do ministry in a Thessalonica **1 Thess 2:18**. You ever had a ministry opportunity just kind of blow up in your face? It could be that things weren't right, people opposed you, plans just fell through inexplicably? It could be that maybe things just happened, but it could also be that Satan hindered you from doing it. We don't know that every failure is a result of Satan, but he's certainly part of the equation.

We read Job and Satan is certainly involved in the death of all of Job's children including natural disasters, attacks from raiding countries and his physical suffering. Certainly God is sovereign - the Lord gave and the Lord took away. But Satan is there in the mix of it all.

And we see that as well in the gospels. Jesus healed the woman with a disabling spirit in **Luke 13**. Remember she was bent over - couldn't fully straighten herself? Jesus calls her a daughter of Abraham - she's a genuine believer, a Christian, who has been disabled because of Satan. She doesn't need surgery or pain medications or a chiropractor, Satan is attacking her.

Now, I'm not against those other things. I don't think Christians should be anti-medicine. But do we ever consider that maybe some of our maladies are caused by Satanic spiritual forces?

Paul says in **2 Cor. 12** that he has a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan. Some people think that might be an actual satanic person who keeps bothering Paul, but others understand it to be a physical malady cause by Satan and demons.

Satan directly attacks Christians in other ways.

Unforgiveness and lack of reconciliation is an opportunity for the devil to cause havoc in Christians' lives according to **Eph. 4:26-27**

Lack of sex in marriage is an opportunity for the devil to work **1 Cor. 7:5**. God designed husbands and wives to be intimate with each other to battle sinful sexual temptation.

Uncontrolled words are often caused by the devil. James says our tongues are set on fire by what? Hell. Remember when Peter told Jesus he certainly wouldn't die in Jerusalem? Jesus said get behind me what? Satan.

So all that to say, there are very specific ways we are tempted by the devil and demons. That's not to minimize personal obedience in any way, that's not to minimize the sinful world around us. But in our camp, I think we need to be aware that we often minimize those things.

One other reason I think we minimize this is because I think we hear **1 John 4:4** "Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world" and think we have immunity to spiritual attack. It's true: the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer is greater than Satan who is in the world. But that doesn't mean we're not tempted. It doesn't mean the adversary can't devour us down and cause havoc.

Let's talk about the other side of this - usually found in more charismatic and Pentecostal circles. Now, this is going to sound like I'm really beating up on the charismatics. And I kind of am. When you look at the broad

swath of folks who wear the name “Christian” usually the ones who write the most on demonic activity and how to deal with it are charismatics, Pentecostals.

Whereas reformed circles often leave out the influence of demonic forces altogether, Charismatic circles often attribute too much. And not only too much, but they often seek to deal with evil spirits in unbiblical ways.

I just want to be fair and say that I’m about to paint in broad brush strokes here - not every charismatic holds to what I say. If you have a charismatic background or know charismatic friends I don’t assume you grew up with these things. And neither should you assume your charismatic friends believe all of these things. But they are all found in the widely charismatic movement, fair enough?

Now, how they approach spiritual issues does have some foundation in the Bible.

They would say that since Satan is the god of this world according to **2 Cor. 4:4** and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one **1 John 5:19** and Jesus says he is the ruler of this world in **John 12:31** they often attribute much of what goes wrong and badly in this world to Satan and his minions.

Now, I don’t think they’re necessarily wrong that Satan is powerful and often meddling in the affairs of people. Where I think they get it wrong is that when something bad happens, many times they are certain that Satan is behind it. A bad thing happened or a good thing failed to happen because Satan thwarted the plan.

Now Satan could have thwarted the plan. From a human perspective, not taking into account the sovereignty of God, Satan can thwart plans - Paul himself says that. The problem I have with that language is that we don’t always know for sure that something did or did not happen because of Satan or evil spiritual powers.

You’re getting ready to go on a missions trip, 2 days before you come down with fever and infection and have to cancel. Was it Satan that gave you that fever and infection?

Where we in the reformed camp might just say “look, it’s germs that are passed naturally and this was God’s sovereign plan” our charismatic friends might say “This was Satan hindering the work of the gospel.” Same situation, different perspectives.

Could both be true? Could it be a germ passed by the work of Satan? Yes. Could it be simply an attack of Satan like a thorn in the flesh? Yes. Could it be just a flu that was naturally passed from someone else? Yes.

The reality is that without divine revelation we really don’t know to what extent - or any - Satan might have in a particular situation. We can’t rule anything out. We know God is sovereign, we also know germs are real, and we know Satan doesn’t want the gospel to go forward. But we need to be careful to not just assume every bad thing that happens in our life is a spiritual attack.

And we need to not assume everything we’re dealing with is simply a natural phenomenon as though there is no spiritual world. I’ve seen close up people who are being controlled by demons and let me tell you it’s wild. And then you add that to a lot of the descriptions about what evil spirits do throughout the Bible and anything is possible.

So maybe if we don’t know what’s going on, part of our prayers is that *if* there are demonic forces at play that the Lord would eliminate them. That seems reasonable.

Now, the emphasis on spiritual warfare as a normal part of the Christian life is pretty common in charismatic circles. You don’t find too many reformed baptists or Presbyterians cranking out books on spiritual warfare. Usually these books are filled with odd practices that have just hints of legitimacy from the Bible. Let me give you just a few of the more common tactics they use.

1. Charismatics will often **pray hedges of protection** around people. They get that idea when Satan complains to God in **Job 1:11** that God has placed a hedge of protection around Job. So they take that phrase and use it as something we need to pray on a regular basis to ensure protection from spiritual attack.

“Give them a hedge of protection,” “God put a hedge of angels around so and so” or something similar. That kind of language is not only common in charismatic circles, but has also spread into broader evangelical circles as well. If you don’t have a hedge of protection then you are susceptible to spiritual attack.

Side: one common theme in these spiritual warfare practices is that you have to say certain words for it to work. And I don’t say this to be mean, but it’s almost like video games where you need to cast a spell to protect yourself from bad guys. If you read their literature, many of these phrases are taught as basically incantations that they use very much like something you’d read in Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings.

But nowhere are we commanded to pray hedges of protection, nowhere do the apostles or Jesus do spiritual warfare by praying hedges of protection. What Satan is saying to God in the book of Job is that God has sovereignly prevented Job from being attacked. He’s observing that he can’t attack Job without God’s say-so. We don’t take words from Satan - the Father of Lies - and make it an outline for how to pray.

If anything we should pray the Lord’s Prayer where at the end we ask God to deliver us from evil, or the Evil One. That’s all we need to ask for: keep Satan away.

2. Another form of spiritual warfare used by our charismatics is **binding and loosening**. And again, it is often taught you need to use these specific words - like a spell - to make it work. You bind Satan or you bind the spirit of whatever. Maybe its a spirit of drunkenness or a spirit of lying or greed and you bind them so they can’t possibly attack anymore.

They’ll also pray to loose angels and loose the peace of God or loose healing or blessing. Binding is what you do to bad things, loosing is supposedly what you do to good things.

They’ll cite Jesus in **Matthew 16:19** or **18:18**: whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven. “See, if we bind it, God will bind it. We just need to trust that God will do this thing.” The problem is that **Matthew 16** is about preaching the gospel and **Matthew 18** is about church discipline. It’s not about how to deal with demonic forces.

Binding not a tactic we ever see for overcoming sin or temptation. And neither is loosing. Nowhere are we called to loose healing or peace or mercy or good things.

3. There’s “**pleading the blood of Jesus.**” Again, this is using specific prayer language to ward off evil spirits. They would understand this as a form of spiritual warfare. This is how you battle demons. “I plead the blood of Jesus over my house.” “I plead the blood of Jesus over my family/body/over this situation.” And the idea - best I understand it - is that someone is invoking the atonement to specifically ward off some kind of demonic attack. Kind of like the Israelites spread blood on the doors of their houses in Egypt.

Rev. 12:11 talks about the martyrs overcoming death through the blood of Jesus, but it’s not a prayer that we are ever to pray in situations for spiritual warfare.

Now, I want to be fair. If you’ve ever been around different people they pray in different ways. Some of it is learned, some is just regional or cultural. That’s not what this is. If you look to where these phrases originate from, the idea here is to use specific incantations to combat spiritual forces, which we never see in the Bible.

4. Charismatics often believe in the idea of **generational curses**. That there are sins that have a stronghold/ foothold - they use that language - on a people or family throughout generations. And the way to conquer that is to rebuke generational curses or break them. Maybe a specific sin or demon has attacked your family for generations and you are putting a stop to that.

We do see in the Bible where sins are often passed down from one generation to another. That is, parents often teach their children how to sin. If you had a parent that cheated people, you might struggle with being honest. If you had a parent that swore a lot, you might struggle with swearing.

Is it demonic? It could be. There could be demonic forces at work causing us to stumble. But we don't have any evidence of generational curses or generation demons that get passed down from one generation to the next in Scripture.

We don't see where we are to bind or cancel or renounce generational curses in the Bible. We just don't see that practice.

5. **Casting out demons.** Now, I wholeheartedly believe there are demons and in some situations they need to be commanded to leave and not back in the name of Jesus. That seems to be what Jesus did constantly in the gospels, we see the apostles doing it as well. I think it's rare - but it happens and it's wild. If you're interested to hear more we can talk sometime.

This is another thing where many times reformed brothers don't talk about this and charismatics want to cast demons out of every person and dog and car and fire hydrant there they walk by. I had a neighbor one time who was constantly casting demons out of all kinds of things including insects that bothered her.

There are other practices you'll see. Trying to bind territorial spirits. Spirits that are linked to places - we do see some of that in the Bible, but we see no practice of casting spirit out of locations.

They will anoint all kinds of things and people with oil. We do see anointing sick people with oil in **James 5** but it's in a very specific situation, not something you see Christians doing very often.

Prayer walks, prayer circles, spiritual mapping of demons. You'll hear a lot about these things. If you want a book that critiques these practices from a reformed perspective, my friend Jim Osman has a book called Truth or Territory I highly recommend you read that outlines many of these practices.

Why do I bring these things up? Because spiritual warfare is important. The spiritual world is real. Demons are real and powerful. Satan is deadly and wants to destroy us.

So imagine there's a special forces unit that's holed up in a building in a foreign country. And the command center radios in and tells them: hey, there's hostiles in your area and you need to be ready for them.

And some of the special forces are sitting there thinking: there's probably some hostiles somewhere, but they don't really bother us all that much. And so they don't prepare. Those guys are going to get slaughtered.

And you've got other special forces guys who are getting really nervous, They believe the bad guys are out there. In fact, they probably believe that bad guys are in the building, crawling through duct work, hiding in closets, waiting in the rafters already. And so they open their crate of supplies and start passing out nerf guns to do battle with the bad guys. What's going to happen to them? The same thing that happens to the other group. They're going to get slaughtered too.

Not taking the spiritual world seriously is just as bad as being paranoid about it and fighting it the wrong way.

What does Paul say here? **Read 10-13**

Paul gives us 4 quick things to keep in mind.

1. We can be strong in the Lord. When it comes to spiritual warfare, we don't need to be scared, we don't need to be afraid. There are demons out and they have real power to tear us apart. But God doesn't want us to cower in fear.

He says be strong because God is strong. We don't have strength in ourselves, we have strength through the means God has given us. We have strength through fighting spiritual battles God's way.

What's God's way? It's putting on the armor of God. It's not ignoring the issue, it's not pleading the blood of Jesus or praying hedges or binding Satan. It's putting on the full armor of God.

2. The only way to stand is with the **right equipment**. that's the connection between **Vs. 10-11. Read**

The way we are strong is to put on the armor of God. You have to have the right equipment for the right situation. You don't jump out of an airplane with helium balloons. You don't try to go scuba diving with air stored in a ziploc baggies. You have to use the right equipment.

The reason this is called the spiritual **warfare** section is because it's describing the gear a warrior would use.

If Paul were writing today, he'd be talking about helmets, bulletproof vests, night vision, .50 caliber machine guns, combat boots, tac belt. This is the ancient equivalent to that. We're in a battle. We're in war. And it's critical to battle spiritual forces God's way.

When you were saved you didn't enter into a battle. You've always been in a battle. When you were saved you defected. You switched sides. And you have to have the right equipment on to fight effectively.

3. Most of our wrestling is spiritual. Read 12

What is he saying? He's saying that much of what we're up against is spiritual in nature. Our primary enemy is not flesh and blood. It's not primarily human/physical things that we're battling - although we do to some extent.

But there are larger forces at work that we need to keep in mind. These descriptions - rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil - are all ways to describe different evil spiritual beings and forces. Things we can't see. Beings that are operating behind the scenes and we don't know it.

There's a YouTube channel called The Bible Project and they have a short series on spiritual beings - I encourage you to look it up. I will say the Bible Project is liberal and they deny some key tenants of the faith. So I don't recommend them for much else. But I think their videos on spiritual beings is really helpful.

And one of the scenes they depict are these spiritual forces as shadowy puppet masters of rulers and countries. Whole peoples are doing their bidding.

I mean do you wonder how everyone just swallowed the whole woke thing or gender fluid thing hook-line-sinker in a matter of years? And now they're rolling it back? What was that? I think there were spiritual forces at play that we can't see. There were authorities and principalities at work in people, in governments, in systems influencing things.

Are the people peddling this stuff accountable? Of course. But how did it happen on such a massive scale? Because we're wrestling against **cosmic powers** over this present darkness.

The world isn't light. The world is dark. The light shines in the darkness - the gospel hope of Jesus shines brightly - but it's still a dark place. The light is growing but God says the day won't dawn until Christ returns.

So here we are: outnumbered, fighting a force we can't even see that has powers we can't even imagine. God has sovereignly delegated them authority. They can influence people and systems and governments and people. They can attack us, tempt us, devour us. What can we do?

4. This is our only hope. Read

God says if we want any hope against the Satanic, demonic forces, we have to put on this armor. Not ignore the fight, not put on fake armor or recite worthless incantations.

No, take up the whole armor of God. And if we do, we will stand in the evil day. We will stand firm against cosmic powers. Because we don't stand in our strength, we stand in the strength of God through putting on his armor.

We'll see how to do that next week.

Pray