

Isn't Spiritual Warfare Fought Against Satan and His Minions?

We move on to make sense of the famous “spiritual warfare” passage. Placing our traditional understanding on the proverbial shelf will afford us the opportunity to see this passage in ways that will continue to uphold the view of the Hebrew Scriptures. The place we go to find an understanding that does not teach of a cosmic Satan who needs to be actively defeated by the believer in spoken prayer.

When looked at critically, we can see this famous spiritual warfare passage is not about telling believers their fight is not against human authorities and religious leaders. The critical look at the famed Spiritual warfare passage will reveal the fight is with the “devil” within each one of us. One will land in the right place if he or she uses correct interpretation that understands how true Hebraic thinking saw this speech of Paul's. The first century hearer would have understood “the adversary” as a part of man not as a Satan. The adversary is the inclination in man that prompts us to choose evil instead of good. Some of the key words used by Paul have been given improper meaning by those who translated them out of the Greek. They translated them in a way that supported their Greco-Roman concept of a spiritual realm, which contains evil forces. The bias translation of men who already believed in the Hellenised view of Satan stemmed from the belief that an evil forces must be subdued in fervent warfare through prayer by the believer.

Ephesians 6:11 KJV Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

As most people read the Ephesians 6 passage they find it difficult to see that all the words and terms used in the passage are really references to physical entities found in the realm of human authority. In fact, we are told to subject ourselves to principalities and powers in another letter from Paul;

Tit 3:1 Put them in mind to be subject to priniplities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

How are we supposed to submit to these principalities in one breath and then be subject to them in the next? What if the principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of wickedness, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places can be shown to men, political and religious leaders, and the opposition man presents to himself from not understanding truth about the God of the Universe? It is then, we can submit to these institutions and political systems in some instances and find our struggle is against them and what they stand for in the next.

Considering Paul's Dispute With The Religion of The So Called “Jews”

After giving a short list of human authorities that we ought to properly submit to, Paul provides the Ephesian hearer with a deeper concept. Of course advocating

that children obey parents; servants obey their master; and masters treat servants properly is all good. However, Paul then extends his teaching to include the real difficulty a person has. As he moves towards a conclusion of this letter, Paul teaches we are to become righteous through Messiah by living and walking in truth, righteousness and peace. We are told to walk in faith, which is an action to indicate that if we do what is right out of a choice to honor Messiah we will not fall to the fleshly desires that pop up in our hearts. Desires that oppose the will of God.

The “**fiery darts of the wicked**” is an expression that refers to the false teachings, charges, and doctrines that come from wicked men or are possibly devised in our own wicked hearts. An example of a fiery dart might be a teaching that said extramarital sexual activity is good for you and will not adversely affect your relationship with God.

Using what Paul calls the full armor of God will prevent the evil inclination from being the guide to the person desiring to be yielded to righteousness. What better way to disembowel the unseen internal foe than to negate the malignant influence of any imagination or reasoning that is adverse to God’s righteousness for believers.

Principalities Are Not Demonic Entities

Many theologians, pastors, and Christians believe “principalities” are unseen spiritual powers that rule over geographic regions and territories. One example of a principality according to this line of reasoning, would be the claim a demon that influences greed of sexual lust is brooding over Las Vegas. It is well known that money and sex flow freely in Vegas. So, the view of the hyper-spiritual person that concludes a demon is responsible for the attitudes prevalent in Sin City, is not uncommon. Charismatic circles have battled the demons of lust and greed for a long time now. And an intriguing thing to consider in this area of spiritual warfare, is why haven’t the continuous prayers of these types had a notable effect on the demons that capture an area and sow sinfulness? Again the answer comes clear when one sees that the systems and institutions we are opposed by, cannot be controlled by human intercession or the inherent free-will of man is abdicated and.

The Beginnings Of The Problem

Paul states our true battle is not against other human entities but against “principalities,” interpreted from the Greek word *arche*. In this context, the word *arche* is not intended to speak of a supernatural evil and manipulative spiritual power. In fact, the word *arche* was only said to refer to angels and demons long after the James Strong and other lexicographers gave us the correct definitions for these words. In other words, Strong says the word refers to an origin of sorts but charismatic thinkers decided it refers to a demon angel. Here is the Strong’s definition of the word

archē

ar-khay'

From [G756](#); a *commencement*, or (concrete) *chief* (in various applications of order, time, place or rank): - beginning, corner, (at the, the) first (estate), magistrate, power, principality, principle, rule.

It appears many bible scholars added their understanding to the word according to their belief system. This practice forced the definition of a word which otherwise did not have that meaning. Notice the final entry on the word in Thayer's definition below;

archē

Thayer Definition:

- 1) beginning, origin
- 2) the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader
- 3) that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause
- 4) the extremity of a thing
- 4a) of the corners of a sail
- 5) the first place, principality, rule, magistracy
- 5a) of angels and demons

If you or I believe that demon spirits exist then we might easily conclude, albeit wrongly, a Greek word such as *arche* is referring to those unseen advocates of evil. Our belief system, whether right or wrong, influences how a word is defined. Often believing in such a thing as demons will lead the lexicographer to define a word in a way that supports his belief. *Arche* is not meant to speak of supernatural entities but is meant to point to the beginnings or origin of sin. Our fight is not against human flesh such as magistrates or religious leader. Our fight is always against the original intent and desire in man to do that which is not what we should do. Paul has taught on this extensively in Romans Chapter 7. One point I would like to make here is important in the grand scheme of how illogical the belief in active demonic entities is. To do this let's consider the chaining of these entities.

If Yeshua is truly our advocate and has disarmed principalities and powers or chained them in chains until the Day of Judgment, as Second Peter and Jude both mention, then who has unchained the demons that are still active today. Note how it is stated in these two passages.

2 Peter 2:4 KJV For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

Jude 1:6 KJV And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

According to Christian understanding on these passages, the demonic angels ought to be chained up forever ... or at least until judgement day. If these verses claim the demons are in chains, then how on Earth are these supposed chained and defeated beings currently active? How did they get loose? Why on earth should we do battle against them if they are chained up? The reason is simple. These passages are speaking about men and leaders who rejected God's ways and are presently dead and will be judged at the resurrection of the unrighteous. That is the reference to someone being chained under darkness until judgment. This will be discussed more later in this book.

As we talked about previously, the word "principalities" often refers to a magistrate or a leader of some type but the meaning of the word can also be something of origin or first in relation to time or rank. In the correct context, here the word *arche* refers to the meaning of man's primal desire to sin, which has been with us from the point of creation and was activated right at the beginning when Adam and Eve chose to disobey Yahweh. An act that is said to have brought death into the world.

What Were "*the powers*" To Paul?

If I referred to a difficult issue as being settled by the "powers that be", would we understand I was speaking of some authoritative governing entity? We all know that "the powers that be" are not supernatural powers and we have no trouble understanding the language of our day. There is no mystery in the terms and word that are commonly used in the culture of our time. In like manner, the language of Paul is not mysterious to those able to perceive the context of his statements and embrace the pre-Christian mindset that believed in One God. Because we hear Paul refer to our battle as also being against "powers", does not have to change our understanding of his speech. Paul is still referring to human issues. The Greek word *exousia* has the interpretation of "powers." It is the confusion over language and concepts of demons that draw the minds of some, to think this word is a reference to an evil cosmic force that can exert power over humanity to get man to fall into sin. *Exousia* however, is a word that should be understood as "man's power of choice and liberty of doing as one pleases."

From the very beginning, man has had the power to choose to do whatever he wants. This is apparent by the fact that the first man was shown two trees. At that, he was told he could eat of one but was not to eat of the other. Simply put, the reason man was told not to do something was only because he was "created" with the potential to choose either to obey or to disobey. Man has ever since struggled against the original potential to choose. The ability if you will, to choose wither good or evil. The fact that choice exists is enough to see that we will always struggle on some level to make the right choice. And at times, we will make the wrong choice.

So far, the words of Paul are saying man's battle is an internal battle, a battle against the original drive of man to use the liberty to choose against himself.

This battle is fought daily against the potential to make choices to sin that bring death. According to the Bible sin brings death not Satan. As a friend at work put it the other day, it is the devil inside of us that we all must fight. Many in Paul's day as in our day, did not see the right way to live and walk out their faith. Many of those who are the leaders in religion and governments are in a sense blinded, their sight is darkened and they need to be illuminated by truth. Paul mentions the rulers of the darkness of this world.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world

Many of the non-leaders in society then and now also have had or do have an anti-spiritual darkness at work in them. A darkness which prevents them from seeing truth and responding accordingly. An acceptable response to seeing truth is to change one's life to conform to that truth by turning from the error of their ways. When Paul uses a term "rulers of darkness", we are not to think of it as referring to some dark, nefarious entity, which lives in a steamy pit and has a mandate to oppress the world.

If our sight is *darkened* we cannot see the light of the truth. We are to think of those in Ephesus who were ignorant of divine things and because they were ignorant, they then are said to be leaders without the ability to see truth. The inability to see the truth and the practice of passing on lies makes one a ruler of darkness.

No one has to battle against a scary, dark, spiritual overlord, but we all battle against the primal propensity to disobey. And in the context of Paul's instruction, the battle is specifically against the ignorance which was prevalent and flourishing in the pagan culture of Ephesus. If you are being oppressed by a system that holds power and authority, then you are battling against the primal propensity to control the way you live and worship. It is not a battle against the human representatives it is a battle against an inherent philosophy.

What Are We Really Struggling Against When Trying To Teach Truth

If you have ever tried to explain a spiritual concept or biblical truth to one who is entrenched in false ideas and man-made doctrine, you might see how the battle is not against them as physical humans. But you are truly up against their inability to see because they are darkened as far as their understanding goes. Neither is it against a cosmic entity. They don't realize they can't see and certainly don't realize they are deceived. If they did then they wouldn't be deceived because the nature of deception is that one trapped in it, cannot recognize they are trapped. This axiom poses a problem for the enthusiastic person desiring to share truth with another. How do you make someone see who really can't because they are of darkened sight? Well you can't, but I laud you for your enthusiasm. This is the problem Paul was dealing with when he said our battle is in part against the rulers of darkness in this world.

The only way they can see is if they decide to respond to the gentle prompting of the Spirit of God and begin to make choices that honor Him while trying to understand His truth through study and healthy spiritual interaction or discussions. Most of us don't see we are deceived until we start to shed our deceptions and come out of the vast forest of erroneous thinking. When you're lost in the forest you often don't realize how big it is until you are rescued and get out of the forest. The darkness of this world is the deeply erroneous and entrenched false doctrines and lies people are subject to. Those who propagate and pontificate such doctrines are the rulers of the darkness of this world.

What Is Spiritual Wickedness In High Places

Lastly, Paul mentions the depravity of the human soul, which is active in those who are in positions of authority and influence. ... *against spiritual wickedness in high places*. Using the Greek word *pneumatikos*, Paul's intended meaning is to show us that the human spirit as a rational soul is an enemy that needs to be battled. After all, the definition for the *pneumatikos* is "rational soul", meaning a thinking human. The thought is not that flesh and blood are to be battled against, as some of the Zealots would have thought, rather it is the issue that humans have a will and a rational being that needs to be overcome in every individual. This will and rational soul that lends itself to wickedness has a particular impact when a person of influence operates out of this level of their humanity. You could beat them up physically as if in a man on man battle but that won't change the core of the wicked person, which is still unsubmitted to the truth.

Heaven On Earth Was Known To Be The Temple In Jerusalem

In ancient writings of the rabbinic genre, we see that the Temple is at times referred to as heaven. On one particular festival called Sukkot²⁷, the Priest was known to perform a water drawing ceremony. In the writings, the Priest is said to be the angel and the Temple is said to be heaven where he ascends and descends from. The process involved a parade of participants following the assigned Priest out of the Temple and down to the pool of Siloam where he would scoop up some water and then ascend back up the incline to the Temple. The water would be poured into a chalice on one corner of the altar and wine would be poured into a chalice at the other corner of the altar. It was said the priest is ascending and descending to heaven. So heaven is a high place wither the Temple of God or perhaps a pagan high place. The regions Paul taught and wrote to were known to have many altars and temples to many pagan gods. When Paul talked about the wickedness in high places he was not likely talking about a place up in the sky such

²⁷ Sukkot is also known as the Feast of tabernacles and takes place from the 15th day of the seventh month to the 21st day of the seventh month. The months must be calculated according to Yahweh's biblical calendar which is based on the appearance of the first sliver of the new moon with the first month of the festival year corresponding to new moon nearest the spring harvest of ripe barley and the spring equinox. The seventh month is generally in the Gregorian months of September/October and the first month is generally in the Gregorian months of March/April.

as heaven is thought of. In his thinking he likely had the pagan doctrines and teachings in mind. Pagan teachings flowed from the pagan high places. It is no stretch to understand Paul's reference to the wickedness of the rational human soul in "high" places as referring to the pagan priests of the local temples and shrines. These men certainly would fit the description of one who was operating in wickedness out of their rational being. Paul was not talking about spirit beings flying through the air, or dwelling in the "high" place of heaven. If these entities existed, they would not have had access to heaven. They would supposedly be evil and Yahweh is said to not have any sin present before Him. If Paul was to rewrite his famous passage on supposed "spiritual warfare" today, it might go something like this.

But most importantly brothers, stay focused on the Master and the power you receive because of His sovereignty and work of overcoming death. Make use of all the good doctrine and truth of the Scriptures as if it is armor of God so that you don't fall to temptations and heresies or are tricked by men teaching lies. We could fight against man physically but that is not a fight that will benefit you or me in the long term. Our real battle is the evil inclination in ourselves and in other man. An inclination that has been there from the beginning of creation. We are really fighting against the primal desire to abuse our freedom of choice. It is because of the original propensity to sin which was brought into the world by Adam and Eve, that we must fight our power of choice. Not just in us but that is the overriding factor in others who oppose the plan of Yahweh. Those people who are supposedly leaders in your governments, religions, and communities have darkened vision and cannot see the truth; therefore any battle against them physically is useless. The problem is deeper than that, right in their very constitution. This original potential to sin lends to the wicked choices and directs the leaders who run the pagan temples and shrines.

These false leaders have a rational being, a will to do the wickedness they are doing and that is what needs to be taken down. You can't fight their flesh because it is something inside of them that needs to be addressed. Something inside all of us that needs to be battled. There is no intellectual or physical fight you can engage in that will remove the conscious desire of these men to do and teach wickedness. So be aware that you can overcome this anti-god thinking and behavior in yourselves but until others submit to Yahweh, they will remain in their unregenerate state. Therefore clothe yourself in all the truth and good doctrine the Messiah has for you and you will be able to make it through the evil that these men might do to you at some time in the future.

Below is the passage as it appears in the KJV. Keep in mind that Paul was writing a letter to a group of believers who would have understood his language. Paul was not writing Scripture and would have been mortified to know that Christianity has used his words to build a demon busting, Satan binding philosophy of "spiritual warfare." He was giving specific instruction to a specific community of believers who had issues unique to their environment. Men were

powertripping and the burgeoning assembly of believers in Messiah was all but forced to adhere to the man-made religion. The words we read today are only super-imposed with meaning that is indicative of a supernatural conflict because of the centuries of reinforced erroneous teaching. Teaching that has propagated a Greek concept of a spirit world containing good and evil forces.

Ephesians 6:10-12

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.