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June 2013

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SPIRITUAL WARFARE, GOD'S DIRECTIVE

The Bible reveals that when we become Christians we are in for a fight. (Everybody say Amen!) We are in a fight, a war, with the world, the flesh, and the devil. *Fight the good fight of faith. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world. A friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.* (And there are hundreds more verses like these.)

Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives the fullest account in the New Testament of how believers are to conduct themselves in their warfare. Believers can't rely on their own strength or wisdom, but must use the weapons the Lord supplies. Ephesians 6 describes the weapons God has provided for us, and you will note that except for the short-bladed sword they are all defensive armor: *the belt of truth, shoes of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvationand sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times....* The introduction to Ephesians in the NLT Study Bible states: "There is no picture here of Christians attacking the devil. Paul's view of the Christian life does not center on spiritual warfare in an aggressive or offensive sense."

Over 60 years ago a Chinese evangelist named Watchman Nee touched the lives of millions of people. When the Communists came into power in China, he was put into prison. Many of his guards were converted by his witness, which angered the authorities. When he wouldn't stop witnessing, they cut out his tongue, blinded him, and finally executed him. Watchman Nee continues to preach through his many books and pamphlets which are used around the world even today.

His teaching on Ephesians describes the Christian life and spiritual warfare with great insight. Following are some of the observations from his message, **Sit, Walk, Stand:**

Our position in Christ – "SIT" (2:6)

Our life in the world – "WALK" (4:1)

Our attitude to the enemy – "STAND" (6:11)

SIT - - *The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.....raised him from the dead, and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and every name that is named....(1:17-21) And raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus....(2:6-9)*

SIT - - - Christianity does not begin with walking: it begins with sitting. Our natural reason says, if we do not walk, how can we ever reach the goal? What can we attain without effort? But Christianity begins not with a big DO, but with a big DONE. Thus Ephesians opens with the statement that

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (1:3) and we are invited to sit down and enjoy what God has done for us; not to try and attain it for ourselves. Walking implies effort, whereas God says *We are saved not by works, but by grace through faith* (2:8) We did nothing to save ourselves; we simply laid upon him the burden of our sin-sick souls. We can receive nothing from God except as we rest in him. Sitting is an attitude of rest.

Adam was created on the sixth day; thus, he had no part in those first six days of work. Adam began his life with the Sabbath, the day of rest. God has put us in Christ. What happened to him happened also to us. *Our old man was crucified with him...that we should no longer be in bondage to sin.* (Rom. 6:6) That is not an exhortation to struggle. That is history, our history, written in Christ before we were born.

WALK - - - Christianity begins with sitting, but it does not end there. Sitting is always followed by walking. Sitting describes our position with Christ in the heavenlies. Walking is the practical outworking of that position here on earth. Ephesians urges upon us two things. Let us look at the first of them:

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to **walk** worthily of the calling wherewith we were called....(4:1-2) This I say....that you no longer **walk** as the Gentiles walk, in vanity, but that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind. (4:17-23) **Walk** in love, even as Christ also loved you (5:2) **Walk** as children of light (5:8-10) Walk is used by Paul to mean the way we live, act, talk, and think. It is everything we do in our day to day lives: the way we act in our relationships with*

neighbors, husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees.

Chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians instruct us in many of the ways we should “walk” as Christians: ***Walk worthy of your calling; with humility and gentleness; bearing with one another in love; don't lie; when angry don't sin; don't steal but give to those in need; don't speak corrupt, angry, filthy, foolish words; don't get drunk; love your wives; respect your husbands; obey your parents; walk in love.*** GOD IS BEING VERY SIMPLE AND PRACTICAL WITH US. HE WANTS US TO BE CLEAR ABOUT HOW WE ARE TO LIVE IF WE CLAIM TO BE CHRISTIANS.

STAND - - *Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...That you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins...having put on the breastplate... having shod your feet... taking up the shield... and the helmet... and the sword...praying...and watching.* (6:10-18)

The Christian life begins with sitting and leads to walking, but each of us must learn also to stand. God has an archenemy, and under his power are countless demons and fallen angels seeking to overrun the world with evil. We see only “flesh and blood” enemies, but God tells us through the Bible that we are “wrestling” against unseen principalities and powers. There is a precious truth hidden in the command to “stand.” Armies march into other countries to subdue, but God has not told us to do this. We are not to march but to stand. This implies that the ground disputed by the enemy is really God's, and therefore ours!

Note that the subject of spiritual warfare (**Standing** against the enemy) is only addressed following the foundation of Our position in Christ (**Sitting**) and Our life in the world (**Walking**). Have you known of Christians who went forth boldly to attack the devil, but their own relationship with the Lord was very shaky, and their walk as Christians was out of order? Pretty soon, down they went!

Note also that all “the weapons of our warfare” described in Ephesians are purely defensive. (See the following article, Needless Casualties of War.) Jesus commissioned all of us who are believers to “*Go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them to obey all things I taught you.*” We are to go to our family, neighbors, co-workers, other nations - - and tell the story of how God rescued us from destruction. We are to teach and preach about the wonderful Good News of a Savior who died for our sins and was resurrected to live forevermore. If we do that, we will be attacked and persecuted.

When that happens, we are to ***Stand, and having done all, to stand.***

NEEDLESS CASUALTIES OF WAR

This is the title of a book by John Paul Jackson in which he speaks against the practice which became widespread some years ago of churches and intercessors binding and casting down the principalities and powers over cities, nations and geographical areas. There are no examples of this kind of spiritual warfare in the Bible! He says that those who do these things are moving beyond the Scriptural authority that has been delegated to them by Christ and are becoming vulnerable to attacks by the enemy. He gave many examples of pastors and intercessors whom he knew personally who had suffered mysterious sicknesses, accidents, and family turmoil, and he learned that they had been practicing spiritual warfare by binding and casting down principalities and powers, and even Satan himself, from their position over cities, areas, and nations.

For instance, “I bind and cast down the principality of gambling and prostitution from the City of Las Vegas!” Or, “I cast down Satan and all his demons from America!” Great days! Such pride and presumption! At the end of this age, Jesus Christ will cast the devil down to the abyss of hell. (Rev. 20:10) Do these people think that they have the authority to shortcut God's prophetic plan and defeat the devil in their own strength?

John Paul is not against spiritual warfare but against its misuse. As he led churches and intercessors to cease and desist from their unscriptural warfare, healing and deliverance came to them. Some years ago I had one example myself which I believe was given to me by God to punctuate and validate this teaching: A lady who is a faithful intercessor at a church in Morelia came for prayer for her hands. She said that while she and another lady had been praying against the principalities and powers over a certain area near Quiroga (a cone-shaped “magic” mountain named Tequisquiapan can be seen from the edge of Morelia, and hundreds of witches and followers of the occult from all over Mexico gather at this mountain each year to do their thing). This lady and her friend were practicing “spiritual mapping,” and when she laid her right hand on a map and cast down the principality of witchcraft from Quiroga, instantly a large knot the size of an egg rose up on the back of her right hand and both hands became clawed and painful as if in advanced arthritis. After several weeks of prayer the knot had gone down, but the clawed and painful condition persisted. I had her renounce the sin of pride of doing battle in the second heaven and ask God's forgiveness. Then as I prayed and rubbed her hands the arthritic condition immediately left! Glory to God!

Someone might say, "Oh God would never permit such a thing when someone is praying in good conscience!" Have you ever read the story of Uzzah who touched the Ark to keep it from falling and God struck him dead? (2 Samuel 6) God has established the parameters for our ministry and even for praying. We are authorized to bind and cast demons out of demonized people. (See Mark 16:17, 9:38, Luke 10:17, Acts 5:16, 8:7, 16:18, 19:12). There are consequences to pride and disobedience even when done in ignorance. The book by Mr. Jackson, by the way, was endorsed by John & Paula Sandford, Harold Bredesen, Carol Wimber, and many other respected leaders.

WHAT IS THE ONLY THING THAT COUNTS?

Galatians 5:6 says that *The only thing that counts is:*

- *faith expressing itself through love* (NIV)
- *faith working through love* (NKJV)
- *faith activated and energized and expressed and working through love* (Amp)
- *acts of love demonstrating faith* (GB)

NO, LORD ?

I love and appreciate John Wimber so very much. At one of his seminars I heard him say, "NO, LORD! IS AN OXYMORON." He said that the earliest Christian confession was, "Jesus Christ is Lord." "Lord," of course, means "God, master, owner, boss."

There is no way that we can say "No" to our master, to our God. If we say no to him, then He is not our Lord.

TRUST AND OBEY

I love that old hymn that started: *Trust and obey, for there's no other way, To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

In many ways, this sums up the Christian life. Sing it, brothers and sisters. And above all, do it.

FILTHY RAGS?

One of the most humbling Scriptures in the Bible is Isaiah 64:6, *But we are like an unclean thing, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.* This tells us that it is not just our sins that are unacceptable to a holy God, but that the highest and best things we do are disgusting to Him. Wow! Little wonder that we cannot hope to please Him by our works. But why is He not pleased with our best actions?

Some thoughts:

Our fallen condition has corrupted us through and through, spirit, soul, and body. There is not an action we can do from our "flesh," our fallen nature, that is not corrupted by selfishness, self-interest, or self-idolatry. *In our flesh dwells no good thing.* (Ro. 7:18)

(2) Those good things that people do, acts of charity or sacrificial giving, can convince them that they are good and certainly don't need a Savior. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.* (1 Cor. 13:3)

DOES PRAYER

REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Dutch Sheets struggled with a question for a long time: "If God is sovereign, does prayer really make a difference?" We

know for a fact that God is sovereign (He is in control all the time – which does not mean that everything that happens is God's will.) We also know that we are supposed to pray for God's will to be done (the Lord's Prayer). But the question remains, since God is sovereign, and His will is ultimately going to be done anyway, does it really make a difference whether we ask him to do things? Dutch said it was one of those questions that he was afraid to ask God. If this question is deep within us, it is easy to let prayer slip out of our lives – because we do not really believe it is necessary or would do any good.

Dutch eventually went to God with the question and received a gold mine of insights: Let's start at the beginning. Genesis 1:26-28 tell us that God created man in His image and gave him rulership: *“Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish... birds...every living creature.”* Yes, God is sovereign, but in His sovereignty He chose to give authority to us. Psalm 8:3-8 confirms: *You made (man) ruler over the works of your hands, and put everything under his feet.* Psalm 115:16 again shows what God has given to man: *The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He has given to man.*

In the New Testament, Luke 4:5-8, when Jesus went into the wilderness, we are told, *The devil led Him up to a high place, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and said to Him, I will give you all their authority and glory, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours. Jesus answered, It is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.* Notice that Jesus did not argue that what Satan said was not true, because man's authority on earth had been surrendered to Satan by sin in the Garden of Eden.

In Matthew 28:18, after Jesus' death and resurrection, He said, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.* Jesus won back the authority that man had lost, and when He tells us, *All authority has been given to me.....therefore (you) go....* the implication is that Jesus is giving us authority, too.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus said, *...I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Here is another way He is saying that He has given us authority. And in John 20:23 He says to His followers, *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.* That is awesome! The authority to forgive sins is His, but He has even given that authority to His Church. Often He tells us that we may pray in His name, which is another way of saying that we may use His authority. It is like exercising power of attorney.

Authority and the Heart of God (from Randy Fisk, The Presence, Power, and Heart of God)

In writing about the revelation given to Dutch Sheets, Randy Fisk emphasized that the authority given to us must always be understood in the context of our relationship with the Lord. (We must learn to **sit** and to **walk** before we **stand**.) Randy said that in the movie *Braveheart*, William Wallace's uncle came to take care of William after his father's death. William stared in fascination at his uncle's gleaming Scottish sword. His uncle, reading his thoughts, cautioned him, “Before you learn to use this (pointing at the sword), you must learn to use this (pointing at his head). I felt the Lord speaking to me, “Before you learn to use this (meaning any of the spiritual weapons He gives us), learn to use this (our heart).”

While ministering at a meeting, a young woman was on our (Randy's) ministry team who had expressed a desire to hear from the Lord. She really wanted to hear His voice and be able to pray effectively for others. As we began to pray for a person, I looked over at this girl and she was weeping. The Lord was actually allowing her to feel His heart, to feel the person's pain as He felt it Himself. (This is important! God is not disconnected and aloof, He suffers with us in all our suffering.) She could do nothing but sit on the couch and pray the entire time we prayed. Then we prayed for a homeless man. Again she was on the couch crying. But this time she got up, came over, and asked him, “Were you ever beaten?” Before he could answer, she said, “I see a picture of you being beaten, and the punches were always to your head. Is that true?” He started crying and answered yes. She said, “It was your father, wasn't it?” He broke down and cried. He experienced a profound healing that night. When we led him into forgiving his father, we could almost see a burden lift from him. At the end of the meeting, someone asked, “How do you feel now?” He said, “I feel lighter than I have ever felt in my life.”

When God doesn't heal or answer our prayers for loved ones

Having read and agreed with all that Dutch Sheets and Randy Fisk say about prayer and authority, I am left with the big question of “Why?” If God gave to Jesus “all authority” to rescue lost and dying people, why does it seem that many times He ignores our prayers for people, and especially for loved ones? A few weeks ago a man from our church died in the Veteran's Hospital here in Grand Junction. He was a committed Christian. He had cancer of the lung, spine, and leg. A

long section of bone had been consumed by the cancer. I had visited and prayed with him in his home, in hospice, and at the hospital, for about a year. Other people from the church also visited and prayed for him. His suffering was terrible. At times our prayers apparently alleviated his pain, but only for a time. Why? I understand that, *There is a time to be born and a time to die*, but the suffering of people, including believers, seems so cruel and pointless.

As a part of their doctrine, Roman Catholics believe that the suffering of the saints, including the suffering caused by disease and accidents, is honored and used by God as a part of the sufferings of Christ for all mankind. Paul writes regarding his thorn in the flesh, *I take pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, distresses, for Christ's sake.* (2 Cor. 12:10) And, *That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.* (Phil. 3:10) Paul also writes in Col 1:24, *I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, the church.*

Paul is not saying that Christ's death on the cross was insufficient to save lost mankind, but that in his own suffering he is identified with the Lord. As a pastor I was often asked to bring comfort and to bring some answers to families that had endured terrible suffering and loss. I did my best to bring comfort, but no one has an explanation, because God has not chosen to reveal it to us in this season. I do believe the following:

- *God is light, and in Him there is no darkness (no evil) at all. (1 John 1:5)*
- As mentioned above, God is not aloof and uncaring about our suffering; in fact, He suffers in us and with us in every pain and loss during this life.
- God does not answer our “Why?” questions. He never defends Himself.
- We live in a broken, lost, dying world - - because of man's sin and alienation from God. This is not the way it was meant to be. God created the universe, and it was *very good*.
- Although God is sovereign, everything that happens here is not God's will. Sin is not God's will.
- We tend to blame God for things that the devil originated.
- People ultimately don't need answers, they need the presence of God. Job, in the Old Testament, suffered terribly, and he blamed God (73 times!), and he cursed his own life and wished he had never been born (17 times). God never told him why he went through that suffering, but when God came to him he was at peace and restored.

God Bless

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