

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 6

Session 69: The Real Spiritual Warfare

In this dispensation of grace (DoG), we are engaged in a spiritual battle, and the battle is over truth, not physical territory. In this battle we have enemies. Satan and those angels in league with him are not our only enemies. All of us have three enemies and you should know what they are and how they work in concert with each other.

As quite the coincidence, I have three children. When they were little, we used to do what most every family does; we used to wrestle. We would push back the coffee table, bring in all the pillows and we would wrestle. Early on, I would take on all three kids at the same time. I would be tickling them and they would be squirming, trying to get away. Eventually, one of them would get the idea to hang back, just out of my arm's reach, and wait for an opportunity to attack me. I learned that if I focused on one of the kids and turned my back on the one waiting, they would take advantage and suddenly jump on me from behind and try to take me down.

Just as I had three kids I was wrestling against, we have three "enemies" that we are fighting against. And just like me with the kids, if you only focus on one of your enemies, the other two will take advantage. Our three enemies are: 1) the world, 2) the flesh, and 3) the devil. If we do not hold all three in our focus, we are likely to lose the battle.

In this day, the church seems to be preoccupied with the battle against Satan, and even so, many are actually losing the battle over truth because they do not understand the true nature of the battle. We will talk about this in a bit. But, the church at large seems to be neglecting the battles against the flesh and the world. Notice that for now I am talking about the church corporately, as a body of believers, when they are assembled together, like we are right now. But we could just as easily talk about us individually.

Worldliness has taken over many local churches today. Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. If you were to ask me, “What are some characteristics of a spiritually healthy church,” I would say that one of those characteristics would be that the church has a saint-centered ecclesiology.

What do I mean by “saint-centered ecclesiology?” An ecclesiology is the study of the church. The Greek word for church is “ecclesia.” “Ec” is the prefix which means “out” and “kaleo” is the verb which means “called.” A church is a called out assembly. Called out of what? Called out of the world. The church is not supposed to be like the world, for we are not of the world.

By “the world” I do not mean, and the scriptures do not mean, all the individual people in the world. We're not speaking of “the world” in the sense of every person on the planet, but we mean the system of thinking, the way of life, and the predominate perspective of those who do not hold to a Christian worldview, a godly lifestyle or a biblical theology. Think of the “course of this world” which Satan put into motion.

When we say “the world” we are talking about a mindset that does not include God. Worldliness is more of a way of thinking than it is a way of acting. For example, sexual immorality and drunkenness are sins of the flesh, and are not worldliness per se. These things may be encouraged or justified by worldly thinking and the world system, but they are deeds of the flesh.

Worldliness is a way of thinking and an overall philosophy of life which stirs the flesh to indulge in specific sins. It is a mindset and a worldview, a systematic approach to life which leaves no room for God and His word. It is a way of thinking that is humanistic; man centered and self-sufficient.

“The world” is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms us to his ideals, aims and methods. It is civilization seeking to function apart from God; a civilization without God.

We have often heard it said, “Believers are in the world, but not of the world.” And just as the word “ecclesia” implies, we do not belong to this world, as we have been called out of it.

Romans 12:2 And **be not conformed to this world**: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Titus 2:12 Teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Just as we wrestle against principalities and powers (P&Ps) by **standing against** the wiles of the devil, we wage war on the world system by 1) **standing against** its ungodly philosophies and imaginations, 2) by **proclaiming** the truth, and 3) **bringing into captivity** every thought to the obedience of Christ.

We cannot adopt the world's thinking on the Divine Institutions, on Christian ministry, on truth or on how we live our lives, for if we do, we will lose the spiritual battle.

Are churches doing this? They are in a multitude of ways. I have already mentioned that we should have a "saint-centered" ecclesiology, which means that when the church is assembled together, it is for the purpose of educating and edifying the saints. The gathering of the church is not for the purpose of evangelism. That is what the church is engaged in outside of the assembling of ourselves together. To equip the saints to do this, we produced our School of Evangelism (where you can learn how to present the gospel) and we print up the QR cards with the plan of salvation on it for when you cannot, for whatever reason, present the gospel.

Getting back to the point; organizing our church meetings to accommodate the lost is to lose our assembling to the world. Whenever a church changes to accommodate the lost, the teachings have to be restricted (no mention of God's wrath, sin or self-denial) or they must be very shallow. The emphasis often changes from sound doctrine to entertainment and a motivational speech.

Speaking of adjusting to the world, just a few years ago, a “seeker sensitive” church in South Carolina sang, as part of their worship service, ACDC’s *Highway to Hell*. A large, well-known church in the Dallas-Fort Worth area had, as a primary worship song for one of its services, *Let’s Get It On*, by Marvin Gaye.

These are just a couple of examples of how the church changes to be like the world, and if we took the time, we could discuss many more, but I think you get the idea.

Now let’s turn our attention to the flesh.

Flesh is the word that the New Testament most often uses to describe the sin nature, which is the ruling principle within all fallen children of Adam. The moment that Adam sinned in the Garden, he acquired a sin nature. What do we mean by “sin nature?” Having a sin nature means that there is an influence, a disposition to sin in the unbeliever.

This sin nature, or flesh, creates a desire to assert one's own will and authority over God in every area of life. It is passed on to all of Adam's descendants.

Romans 8 is a key passage that describes the nature, extent, and influence of the flesh. All who are “in Adam” are “in the flesh”, and controlled by the flesh. They cannot please God because they are hostile toward God and are not subject to the law of God.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.⁸ So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Apart from being justified unto eternal life (JUEL), the unbeliever has no new nature, and no spiritual capacity to do anything pleasing to God. The flesh produces a wide range of sins and sinful activities.

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*;
Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft,
hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,²¹ Envying,
murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like...

The flesh also produces what on the surface appear to be good deeds and righteous acts. None were more outwardly righteous than Saul of Tarsus, and yet all of his righteous activities were sinful because he was seeking to establish his own righteousness apart from Christ.

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

What is it that prompts someone to do religious activities in an effort to gain God's favor? The flesh. The flesh, in its pride, seeks to establish itself and its own efforts as meritorious before God. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that the flesh, not the devil, is the main and most influential enemy that the Christian faces.

Since we have been identified with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, our old man is crucified; dead and gone. We're no longer the person we once were in Adam we are now new creatures in Christ.

Though our old man, our old identity in Adam, is dead and gone, the sin nature, or flesh, continues. We still have to battle against the flesh. Though I am no longer in Adam, and though I've been set free from the power of sin, the flesh still wars against the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

How are we to deal with this propensity towards sin, the flesh? Romans 6:1-10 is the key. First, we're to know that our old self was crucified with Christ and that we're no longer slaves of sin.

Second, we're to consider ourselves to be free from sin, dead to sin; Romans 6:11. On that basis, we do not let sin reign in our body by obeying it in its lust; verse 12. We must believe the truth that sin no longer has power over us. We accept it by faith, believing it to be true, that we are no longer slaves to sin.

Third, we choose righteousness; we choose to obey God in His word. In this way we walk by faith, believing what Scripture says about our emancipation from sin. Victory over sin comes down to choosing to obey righteousness. If we present ourselves as slaves of righteousness and choose to do righteousness, then obeying righteousness, we become slaves of righteousness. If we choose to yield our bodies to sin, then we become slaves to sin. The unalterable law of sanctification is that we become slaves to the one whom we obey.

We are engaged in a step-by-step, day-by-day, decision-by-decision walk with Christ. The flesh has power over us only if we choose to obey it. We are engaged in a lifelong, daily, habitual battle against the flesh. The Spirit wages war against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit.

The Puritans used to have a phrase that unfortunately has fallen into disuse, "the mortification of sin." We put sin to death. We see sin for what it is; our enemy. We put to death the deeds of the flesh by resisting temptation and choosing obedience because of the doctrine working in us. That is what it means to overcome sin by the power of grace.

Okay, we know we have these three enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil. These three work in concert with each other against the believer. For example, all unbelievers are in bondage to Satan, whether they know it or not. He influences them by conforming them to the world system. The world system is in sync with

our flesh. This means that Satan has created a system which works to accomplish his work in the world, and our flesh has an affinity for things contained in that system, making us naturally attracted to conform to it. This is how all three work in harmony. The sin nature of unbelievers is sympathetic to the evil nature of the world system.

Why did we take this side trip to discuss the world, the flesh and the devil? So we do not overlook them as we learn about spiritual warfare against the principalities and powers.

The material we have covered so far has a two-fold purpose: 1) to provide a biblical framework by which we can evaluate certain practices associated with spiritual warfare today, and 2) provide a foundation upon which a biblical theology of spiritual warfare can be built.

Let's examine the frame itself.

1. We have affirmed that the Bible and the **Bible alone** should govern our theology of spiritual warfare. In other words, no extra biblical revelations (EBRs).
2. **Paul's epistles** are our instruction, so we rightly divide the word (RDW).
3. We have seen from 2 Corinthians 10 that spiritual warfare is not a hand to hand battle with devils over territory, but a **battle over truth** waged with the word of God.
4. We have spent some time considering our **three enemies** and how they work in concert with one another.

And now we will evaluate certain practices which are often associated with spiritual warfare. These practices are assumed by many to be biblical. The language of certain spiritual warfare techniques has made its way into the Christian vernacular and well-intentioned believers having adopted these methods; often without ever pausing to evaluate them in light of Scripture. Practices such as binding Satan, praying a hedge of thorns, renouncing generational curses, naming and praying against territorial spirits, exorcising demons from Christians, pagans, or

inanimate objects, rebuking the devil, and pleading the blood of Jesus have become virtually woven into the fabric of modern notions of spiritual warfare. The legitimacy of these practices is assumed and never questioned. These have become so much a part of the fabric of the prayers and lives of some people in churches that to question their legitimacy in some circles qualifies anyone who objects as a heretic.

These things are not isolated to some fringe movement within Christianity. They are taught in fundamentalist, conservative, Bible believing and gospel centered churches. They are not the unique property of the charismatic movement. I am in no way questioning the motives of those who practice or teach the methodologies evaluated here, I am only seeking to evaluate the practices.

Praying A Hedge of Thorns

If you have never been exposed to this teaching before, you're probably asking yourself, what is that? Supposedly this is the practice of erecting a spiritual hedge of protection around persons, places or things in order to prohibit satanic influence or attack. The idea is, once a hedge of thorns is prayed around someone, Satan and his devils cannot get through to affect the person or thing.

This is actually a little different from the practice of "binding Satan." In binding Satan," Satan is kept from doing something supposedly that he otherwise would have the power to do. Praying a hedge of thorns is not taking Satan's ability away or restricting what he can do, but rather you are praying for someone to be inoculated against his temptation or attack.

The idea is that praying a hedge of thorns prevents satanic influence in the life or mind of the person being protected by the hedge. The hedge is often treated as a "one size fits all" hedge. For example, you might pray a hedge of protection for your spouse, your family, your home, your children, your job, your car, your church, or even your town.

If you want to win unbelievers to Christ, we are told to first pray a hedge of thorns around the person, so they cannot be attacked or influenced by Satan against the gospel.

This kind of prayer would go like this: “Lord, I pray a hedge of thorns around the church service this Sunday, in the name of Jesus, the Son of God.”

Apparently praying this one time is not sufficient, for we're encouraged by the “experts” in spiritual warfare to pray this prayer regularly, at least daily, if not several times a day. I'm not sure if this is because the prayer has a time limit or what they are thinking. Also, if this really works, then why not have every believer pray this hedge of protection around the whole world and everything in it, and have them pray this prayer every day. If the prayer actually works, that should shut Satan completely down.

If we can pray a hedge that keeps Satan out, then why not pray a hedge that keeps Satan in; prison him away from everything and everyone.

I was first exposed to this teaching at a conference of sorts, many years ago. The supporting references to support this were Hosea 2:6 and Job 1:10.

It sounded biblical. At that time, it made sense to me that we could prohibit Satan from influencing people or places by using this practice. But is this what is actually being taught?

If I had understood right division properly, the fact that all of the references to support this kind of spiritual warfare came from outside of Paul's epistles, would have told me something. And yes, there are such things as inter-dispensational principles, but in order to be such they need to be expressed in both programs. And the “hedge of thorns” or any such kind of prayer or principle of limiting what Satan can influence in a person, does not show up anywhere in Paul's epistles.

So, let's look at the references I mentioned. Do they mention a “hedge” or “thorns?” They do, and because of that, when I heard this being taught, I assumed it must be biblical.

Hosea 2:6 Therefore, behold, **I will hedge up thy way with thorns**, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

See, there it is, the hedge of thorns. But the real question is this: is this verse teaching anyone to pray a hedge of protection around someone or something to

keep Satan from influencing them or it? To answer this question, we will look at the very first rule of interpretation; context. So, let's read the context.

As we get ready to do this, let's get some background on Hosea. When you think about the history of Israel in connection to the courses of punishment, when God raises up Hosea, the fifth course of punishment is "at the door," so to speak.