

TROUBLED CHURCH - PART 1

Lesson 2 w/Answers

Battling Satan

This week I would like to continue our side trip from our normal study, as we continue to look at what it means to be in a spiritual battle. As we here at Southview continue to seek God's will in dealing with our current challenge, it is important for us to understand spiritual warfare and to gain spiritual insight.

As I have mentioned before, it is difficult to seek out God's will and wisdom in the midst of conflict and turmoil. It is always "easier" for us to take action ourselves by striking back, or lashing out, at what we perceive to be the issue or cause, without first seeking God's direction. It is easier to hate than to love, easier to blame a person or group than to see beyond the carnal (physical) world we live in. It is considerably more difficult to gain and use spiritual discernment when we see those we love in conflict, embittered, or hurt by the actions of others.

Last week in class, I mentioned that the moment we assign blame to an individual or group of individuals, Satan has already won. This is because assigning blame takes the focus off of the real cause of the conflict: Satan's evil schemes. Further, we need spiritual discernment in order to determine when something hurtful is actually caused by evil, or is indeed discipline that the Lord is bringing on his loved ones. How can we know the difference, and how can we successfully be ready to battle against Satan's ways? If indeed the Church is to break through the gates of Hell itself to find the lost and bring the Good News of the Gospel, how do we know that we are ready, and how do we know where we are to go? I hope to shed some light on the answers to those questions in this lesson.

For this week, read Ephesians 6:10-18 and Hebrews Chapter 12; then consider the following:

1. According to Paul, the writer of Ephesians, why do we need to put the armor of God on?
 - a. ANSWER: So that we can take a stand against Satan. Without the Armor of God, we do not stand a chance against Satan; don't go into battle without your armor.
2. What does Paul mean by putting on the armor? How is this done?
 - a. ANSWER: It means to apply these things to our lives, internally and externally. We need to have Christ living in us, and we need to be applying His Holy Word to our lives. If we do, then we will live out the renewed life that Christ has given us. Strong, and standing on solid ground, we will be able to resist Satan and the forces of this world that would defeat us.
3. What does Paul mean by "the devil's schemes"? What would these be?
 - a. ANSWER: We know that Satan is a liar and a deceiver, one who mocks God and wants only one thing: to destroy God's creation and set himself up above God. He will do this by trying to get us to believe lies and half-truths for truth, by twisting God's words and commands for Satan's own benefit; and he will do this through cleverly-devised schemes, all in an attempt to lure us into his trap, just as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden. He will appeal to our senses of sight and taste, for example, in order to get us to eat or drink things that we should not or to abuse those things that we do eat and drink. He will appeal to our sense of well-being to get us focused on buying the next big thing, even though we really don't need it; or he may appeal to our pride, as he tried to do with Christ in the desert. You will recall that after Christ's 40 days in the wilderness, Satan promised Him the world - something that he actually could not give, but he wanted Christ to think that he could. Satan is clever, and he is a deceiver and a liar. Scheming is what he does, and he does it very well. We can only know the truth about something through Christ, through putting on the full armor of God.

4. Is our battle against specific people or individuals? What does Ephesians 6:12 say?
 - a. ANSWER: Our battle is actually not against people or individuals - remember that next time you find yourself in a conflict. Our struggle as Christians is against the powers of darkness in this world and the evil spirits in the heavenly realm. When we realize this, we will fight the conflict we find ourselves in differently - and we will be victorious.
5. Who exactly are we battling then?
 - a. ANSWER: Satan and his followers; it's really a spiritual battle. If we find ourselves in conflict as Christians, we need to step back and assess the cause of the conflict. Is it something that we've created or is it in fact a result of being a Christian living in a lost and dying world and trying to get the Good News of Christ out? As Christians most of our real conflicts are going to be driven by the evil in this world and the forces of evil "in the heavenly realm" as Paul labels them. Satan and his followers, and the effect of falling from grace on the human race, combine to put us as Christ followers in a struggle not against people - but against these forces. This becomes an entirely different struggle than trying to gain victory over a personal opponent - and it becomes a conflict that requires the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit as we put on the full armor of God and stand firm against Satan and his schemes.
6. List below each specific piece of armor cited in the Ephesians passage, along with what each piece does.
 - a. ANSWER 1: According to the NIV Version of the Bible, the first piece of armor is "the belt of truth". Christ tells us that when we become His, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The next piece is the "breastplate of righteousness". Our righteousness comes only from Christ; without it, we cannot live a righteous life.
 - c. ANSWER 3: Next, we are to have our feet "fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace". Our foundation, the one thing that keeps our footing solid in this lost and dying world, is God's Holy Word, the Bible. We must be grounded in it if we are to stand firm.
 - d. ANSWER 4: Then we are to take up the "Shield of Faith". The shield protects a warrior from fatal attacks of arrows aimed at the heart. It protects during times of conflict and keeps us fighting. We cannot suffer a fatal arrow piercing our hearts as long as we take up our shield of faith.
 - e. ANSWER 5: Then, we are to don the "helmet of salvation". Just as the shield protects our heart, the helmet protects our head. Salvation, the knowledge that we are saved eternally by Christ's shed blood, protects us when Satan attacks us and attempts to get at us through our thoughts and human way of thinking.
 - f. ANSWER 6: And finally, we must arm ourselves with the "sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God". This is our one and only needed weapon - God's Holy Word. It really is all that we need.
7. From this list then, you should be able to identify the various ways that Satan attacks us. For example, in Ephesians 6:14, the belt is defending the truth, or protecting us from lies and deceit. Thus, Satan attacks the truth using lies, deception, etc. List the remaining things that he attacks by looking at the rest of the armor. These are what we are to watch for when you are in a battle with Satan.
 - a. ANSWER: As you can see from the reading in Ephesians, Paul is describing not only the pieces of Armor that a Roman Soldier took into battle, but also the order in which it was put on. For example, if you grabbed your shield for battle first, then you would be unable to put on your helmet or your belt. So, by observing the order presented here, we can also see the pieces being defended and the layers of defense that we have against Satan. Beginning with the belt of truth, which protects us from his lies and deceit, we then put on our breastplate so that we may live a righteous life with the truth protecting us, because having the truth but living unrighteously is exactly what Satan would like us to do. Following the belt and the breastplate, we ground ourselves, we "put on our feet" if you will; this is the Gospel. Just as a warrior cannot afford to lose his footing in combat since it could be fatal, so too in our conflicts, we must always stand with firm footing based solidly on God's Word. Having followed the previous steps, we can now grasp our shield to protect our hearts; and we can put on our Helmet to protect our heads, our thinking and how we perceive things. Then, with the sword - the Word of God - we are ready for conflict; and more importantly, we are ready to go into battle and win, knowing that Satan and his forces are no match for God. 1 John 4:4 tells us that greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world; and Romans 8:31 asks us "If God is for us, who can be against us?!"

8. After we put on the armor, we are instructed to use it against the devil's schemes and to do one other thing as we battle him. What is it? (see Eph. 6:18)
 - a. ANSWER: We are to be alert at all times and to always be in prayer for all the saints. Thus, fighting Satan requires us to have on our full armor and to be in constant prayer for all of the saints, since we do not know which ones will be attacked next. Just as Jesus was able to defeat Satan in the desert through God's Word and prayer, we are to follow this example to secure victory over the devil and the evil schemes of this world.
9. In Hebrews Chapter 12, we are called to cast aside the sin that can slow us down as we run the race (or "course") that God has laid out for us. And we can do this, if we are wearing the armor identified in our Ephesians passage. If we run this race, and we are wearing that armor, Hebrews 12:7 tells us that we will still encounter other hardships that are NOT the schemes of the Devil. What are they?
 - a. ANSWER: These are the times that our heavenly father is disciplining us. We need to be careful when difficult times and testing come upon us that we do not automatically attribute every difficulty to Satan and his schemes. God is our eternal father who loves us and wants only the best for us. As such, he will bring times of discipline into our lives in order to help us grow, just as we do with our children. Don't mistake them for Satan's attempts to defeat us.
10. So, as we have noted, hardships come into our lives several different ways: (1) simply because we are imperfect people living in an imperfect world (car accidents, hurricanes, etc), (2) due to Satan's evil schemes, or (3) through God's discipline. How can we tell the difference? I.e., when the world (or our world) is upside-down, how can we tell if this the result of Satan's evil schemes against us, or the providential act of living in an imperfect world, or as a result of God disciplining us? This answer is key to developing spiritual "discernment" in times of turmoil. For the answer, read verses 11 through 15 of Hebrews Chapter 12 and jot down some of the ways that we can discern the root cause.
 - a. ANSWER: From this reading, we see that God's discipline produces good in our lives, not harm. As the writer of Hebrews states, it produces a "harvest of righteousness and peace". Satan wants to harm and destroy, while God wants to heal and build. We also need to remember that we live in a fallen world, and that good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. Being able to spiritually discern between these three, the world in which we live (earthquakes, wars, famines, accidents, etc.), Satan's attacks on the followers of Christ, and God's disciplining of His children, will greatly help us in living the empowered and victorious life that Christ wants us to live.

The schemes of Satan are meant to destroy, to tear down, to elevate himself over God, to spread discord, distrust, and to dilute the Word of God. God's discipline on the other hand, while painful, is meant to bring growth and righteousness, and to benefit those he loves. God wants to build up, and Satan wants to tear down. So when turmoil surrounds us, we should consider that first and foremost we will be victorious if we stick with God and stay grounded in His Holy Word.

Always seek Him out through prayer, and be ready for His will to be revealed before taking any action. Waiting on the Lord is a key precept that we observe throughout both the Old and New Testament. Waiting on the Lord reveals to the discernor that what is the "good and perfect will of God", and it brings Satan's schemes into the bright light of day.

In these times of tough decisions, great anxiety, and periods of uncertainty, remember that Satan's battle plan can be summed up in three "C"s: contentiousness, complacency, and compromise. If we keep God's armor on and stay grounded in His Holy Word, He will reveal his good and perfect will to us. If God be for us, who can be against us? For we more that conquerors through Christ Jesus!

Have a great week everyone, and may God richly bless you as you continue to study with us each week.

Yours in Christ,

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