

Introduction to Spiritual Warfare: 1 Peter 5:8

The Martin Lloyd Jones was a man who had been trained as a medical doctor, but then while in his twenties, God called him to be a pastor. At first he was a pastor in Wales, then he became a pastor of much godly influence in London. During his first pastorate at a place called Sandfields in Wales, the church and community experienced something of a revival. In that area there lived a well-known spirit medium. Each Sunday evening she was paid a rather handsome sum leading spiritist meetings, sort of like the channelers that we have today around. But one Sunday she became ill and couldn't go out. And she noticed the numbers of people passing her house on the way to the church, and she noticed that they seemed to have an eager anticipation. And this spawned in her a desire to attend one of these church services, and she did attend, and she was saved. A solid transformation took place which caused her to have a consistent Christian testimony to the end of her life. Afterwards, she gave this testimony about the spiritual atmosphere within the church that first time she visited, and I quote, "The moment I entered their chapel and sat down on the seat amongst the people, I was conscious of a supernatural power. I was conscious of the same sort of supernatural power I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings but there was one difference. I had a feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power." And it's interesting that the demons in the New Testament are sometimes called "unclean spirits." And as you read through the New Testament it doesn't take long to realize that there are two kinds of spiritual or supernatural power. There is the clean power, but there is also the unclean power. And as students of the Bible we associate unclean spiritual power with Satan and his demons which are sometimes called angels or fallen angels and unclean spirits. And of course we associate the clean supernatural power with God in the form of the trinity, God the Father, the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Also included in the clean spiritual power are the angels who kept their abode and did not rebel against God, and other created spiritual beings such as the seraphim, and teraphim, and who knows who else might be out there that we are not very aware of. And I really do believe that we could also include in this whole side of things, if you will, the clean power, the new man that we are in Jesus Christ, it awaits to be seen just how powerful it will be, it will be somewhat powerful in heaven, but certainly it is clean. It has the cleanness of God in its very nature. And so when we think in terms of spiritual warfare, we usually think in terms of the titanic struggle that goes on between the two very opposite spiritual forces. And this struggle is very real and it probably has far more dimensions to it than most of us understand.

Some years ago at this church we had, if you will, an invasion, or an attack from the unclean side of supernatural power. A demonic force was attacking me, oppressing me, rather severely, right here in the pulpit as I was giving a message. And it's difficult to describe the experience from my end. I had severe difficulty putting my words in proper order. I could hardly say a complete sentence without getting my words jumbled up. Even during the songs beforehand, I could not keep the words coming from my mouth lined up with the words on the page. So there was an intense if you will, suffocation or oppression on my thought processes during the message. I had to very close read everything I said, I had to place great concentration on each and every word, and in my mind there was no flow to the message at all and it seemed like a gray gauze had enveloped my thinking and my mental perceptions, and immediately after I read a word or a sentence it was lost to me, I could not grasp, mentally, where I wanted to go with my next thought or theme. And so now I can understand a little better how Satan has the capacity to steal the word of the gospel from someone's heart as described in the parable of the sower, and how he can remove

God's word so completely from a person's thinking, and how he can inflict a mental and spiritual blindness upon the unsaved, preventing thoughts of truth and light from penetrating the conscience. Also, my hands began to tingle, and they went numb for a while. And then for the rest of the afternoon I felt what I guess could be called a brain drain. The concentration it took to get through the message left me feeling as I would had I taken two or three college exams in one day. But God is sovereign, and part of God's sovereignty is this: No demonic force would have access to me except that God allowed it. And whenever God allows such a thing He always has a reason, there is always either a divine purpose or at the very least a divine usefulness if we look to God for the lessons of such a thing. And ultimately, God always gets the glory. This experience certainly got my attention, and as a result I decided way back then to give a series of messages on spiritual warfare. And so what I have decided to do is to, beginning today, rework those messages. Because I gave them so long ago, and there has been so much growth in my life since then, rework those messages, immerse myself in them once again, cut out what is unnecessary, add new insights, hold them, and try to make them flow better and more to the point. And so today will be nothing more than an introduction, and the next time we will begin to get more into the nuts and bolts of this whole issue. And as part of my introduction I want to set the stage by giving several, at least three of what I consider to be valid reasons for setting this theme.

Number 1 (Reason 1 for setting this theme on Spiritual Warfare): Because it is biblical. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober of spirit be on the alert, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." You and I have an adversary. An enemy. And we are not talking here about a gentlemen's disagreement. We are talking about an all out total war to the death. This is not a war that we asked for. It's a struggle that we find ourselves in simply because we belong to Jesus Christ. As when, for instance, Germany invaded Poland and then France at the beginning of World War II, those countries did not ask for war, it was inflicted upon them by an outside power. And because they were either too weak, or were not prepared, or did not have the foresight or the political will to resist at the proper time, they were devoured. And so with us, as believers in Jesus Christ, we did not ask for this warfare. It has been inflicted upon us, and as with Poland and France, it is possible for a Christian to be devoured. The apostle Peter would not have warned us to be sober and alert and that Satan seeks someone to devour if it were not possible for him to devour a saved one. Peter gives this warning to believers. And the term devour literally means to drink down, or gulp entire, or swallow whole as a snake or serpent does to its prey. And this does not mean that Satan owns the Christian that he devours, or can thwart that Christian's salvation, but it has the idea of complete immobilization, of bringing the Christian to a complete standstill concerning spiritual growth, spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual freedom certainly, and impact for Jesus Christ and God's glory. Satan can accomplish this in various ways. For instance, by encouraging what I call emotional sin as in bitterness and unforgiveness, or by supercharging some other sin that the Christian has been negligent to deal with or has not known how to deal with properly, and especially by fostering deception in the Christian's mind deflecting him from the truth of Scripture so as to get him off on tangents listening to the voice of God or the voice of Truth other than in God's word. Or by fomenting discord through people among the brethren, and the sad part about this is that there are many Christians who have been devoured by Satan, totally immobilized, but because they keep up certain appearances, activities, and fronts, they are not even aware of it. They are ignorant of being poisoned to the point of spiritual sterility by the enemy, which means that being devoured can sometimes look, by all outward appearances, very spiritual and very religious. Being devoured can sometimes look very

different from what we might at first assume. So we will study this issue simply because it is a reality that we have to deal with, and to ignore it is to already concede defeat.

Second (Reason 2 for setting this theme on Spiritual Warfare): We will look at spiritual warfare because of the increase of demonic activity in our culture. Just a few quotes from people:

An Anglican by the name of Michael Green wrote, “We are experiencing an occult explosion.”

Billy Graham long ago once wrote, “Legions of demons which have previously concentrated on other cultures are now invading the culture of America.”

Hal Lindsey, bless his soul, put it this way, “The last fifteen years have witnessed an explosion of interest in psychic phenomena and parapsychology.”

And if any of you have been aware of the changes for instance in TV programming over the past thirty years, there is a tremendous increase in just this type of programming. In fact, most major universities have classes which not only study the history and the content of occultic themes but actually encourage students in their practice opening them up to the demonic world.

Charles Swindoll wrote in a little booklet, “I urge you to make a serious study on your own from the Bible about the devil and his hosts of demons. Remember, ignorance of him puts you at his mercy,” I would not have used that term because he doesn’t have any mercy, “and robs you of the confidence you need to stand against his strategy.” And so he says inform yourself.

In our society, the avenues through which an individual can make contact with the dark realm or the demonic realm have been vastly increased from years ago when the game, for instance, Dungeons and Dragons came out, to some TV shows which are increasing in the whole concept of the paranormal including children’s programming which some has taught techniques on how to reach out to spirit guides, to the whole plethora of new age approaches to the spiritual realm, an immersion for instance in horror movies or books can open that door, a teen who saturates himself or herself in heavy metal music, and I’m talking saturation here, can become demonically influenced, a commitment to eastern religions and their methods of approach to the spiritual world can do it, then there is the mass popularity of the Harry Potter phenomena or onslaught, and that’s not a complete list. No longer are we like the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike. The water has broken through in just too many places, and as people immerse themselves in these open windows to the occult, demonic forces will lay claim to their lives and they will not easily let go. In some cases, to free oneself, even after getting saved, is like removing porcupine quills. And if you pull the verses together which give the description of the spiritual condition of the last few years of this age, you find a dramatic amount of satanic activity. Matthew 24:24 speaks of false christs and false prophets actually showing great signs and wonders. 2 Thess 2:9 indicates that the coming of the antichrist will be in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders. And this causes concern for those dear saints who seek healings and miracles but have little or no biblical discernment, they just open themselves up to the false things. And these types of conditions or events usually do not just appear overnight. There is usually a build-up to them. A build-up of greater demonic activity, and also, of a greater acceptance of how that activity expresses itself within our society, and it is very likely, or certainly possible, that we are in the midst of that build up right now. And so what this means on the practical level is that as we deal with people on a daily basis, because we are in the

midst of spiritual realities as Christians, we will be dealing with more and more people who are more and more demonically influenced. And many that get saved out of such involvement are going to need help getting free from the continuing spiritual interference in their minds and in their lives. And I will illustrate with a conversation that I had with a particular gal at a youth camp. After I had given a message, a teenage gal wanted to speak with me. She opened up and said that she had been sexually molested by three different men when she was younger. Then about five months before our conversation she began to have nightmares almost every night. And so I asked her to describe them. I asked about her conversion to Jesus and she seemed to have the testimony of a genuine Christian. And as I asked questions and as I listened, I began to sense that she was experiencing a real spiritual battle in her mind, and so I asked this question, “Do you ever hear a voice or voices in your mind that you know are not your own?”

and she looked at me and she said, “yes,” but she had never told anyone.

And so I said, “are you sure it’s not your own voice?”

And she said “yes.”

And so I said, “How many?”

And she said, “two.”

And so I said, “How can you differentiate between your own inner voice and these two?”

And she said, “oh I can tell.”

“What do these voices say to you?”

“They tell me that I am worthless and that no one loves me.”

“Anything else?”

“They tell me to have sex.”

“Anything else?”

“They tell me to kill myself.”

I asked her if there was anything in her home of a cultic nature. She said her dad and brothers had all kinds of horror movies. I asked her if she had unforgiveness toward those who had abused her, she said she didn’t think so. I said, “do you consider these voices your friends or your enemies?”

She said, “enemies.”

And then I asked this, “Do you know what these voices are?”

She said, “no.”

And so I told her. “They’re demons for whatever reason, however the door was opened, still claiming access to your life.” And she told me later that during the final evening while they were sitting around the campfire the voices started up again.

Now this is not an isolated incident. There are more and more Christians struggling to get free from such old baggage. And the question becomes, how do you help such people get free? And in a nutshell, my approach is wrapped up in James 4:7 which says, “Submit therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” And notice that the person in this verse, him or herself, is to submit to God, and the person, him or herself is to resist the devil. This is a very individual, personal thing. No one else can submit to God or resist the devil for you or for someone else, although someone else can help teach you how to do it. How does this work, what does it look like, submitting, for instance? I will get into more of the details later in more messages, but briefly, there must always be complete submission to God first. For instance, if there is some activity the person is involved in, such as any dabbling in the occult or immersion into the occult, these things must be confessed as sin, renounced and stopped. And if there is any unconfessed occultic activity from the past it really must be specifically confessed, and that’s part of the whole realm of submission to God. If there is any bitterness or unforgiveness or unresolved anger in the heart, it must be resolved. Always, submission to God comes before resisting the devil, or resisting the devil simply does not work. But after submission comes resisting. What does that look like? And I’ll get more into the details later, but the term resist is an active word. It is a verb. It literally means to stand in opposition to, or to stand against. And it is a command, the same level of command as submitting to the Lord, resisting the devil is also a command. And depending on the situation, it could take the form for instance of quoting Scripture as Jesus did when he was tempted and then telling Satan to be gone in the name of Jesus Christ. So we should look at this issue of spiritual warfare because it is biblical, and we are in the midst of it whether we look at it or not, and because demonic activity is on the increase in our society, and we really do need to be able to protect ourselves and if possible, help others.

Third (Reason 3 for setting this theme on Spiritual Warfare): Is because of our ignorance of spiritual things. 2 Cor 2:10,11, Paul speaks of forgiving a brother who had sinned, and then verse 11 says, “in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.” But I think, since this verse was written, those of us especially who have been conditioned by western civilization, have grown ignorant about spiritual things. Paul wrote his epistle in the context of a culture where almost everyone was aware of the spiritual world. Practically everyone in the Roman empire worshipped demonic forces through their various temples and occults. And though they did always view these gods as demonic, practically everyone believed in the spiritual realm. And when a person was saved out of that culture, they understood the reality of demons and their ways. But since the so-called enlightenment, the renaissance, and especially since the industrial revolution and the advent of Darwinism, western civilization has taken on a rationalistic world view. And the rationalistic world view states that the only reality is physical reality. Only that which can be scientifically verified is real, which is an extremely limited approach to perceiving reality. Practically all of the educational institutions of the western world are based upon the rationalistic world view, and so is our medical establishment, and so they miss diagnose much. And as a result, we tend not to be as aware of spiritual realities as those for instance in even some poorer countries, and certainly not as much as the Romans did way back when, and this rationalistic view has been a great shield behind which Satan has been able to operate, because the rationalistic world view, and it’s almost counterintuitive things here, almost things that seem opposed to each other, because the rationalistic world view does not negate human spiritual thirst, and so in spite of

the world view, rationalistic, many will still try to satisfy this spiritual thirst, but by drinking from the wrong spiritual source. At times, it seems that the rationalistic world view only applies when it comes to the clean spiritual power. While Satan has been convincing people that he does not exist, he has been blinding them to their own lostness, and leading them to the wrong spiritual sources, and I think this has helped warped the churches view as well concerning spiritual dynamics. Again, when I was at a summer camp teaching teens, I got into a discussion with one of the other staff over this very issue. We had a disagreement over the possible sphere of operation of demonic forces within the life of a Christian. This man believed that demonic forces could not penetrate any aspect of a Christian's life. Not the flesh, not the brain, the mind, not the emotions, not anything, that all Satan could do was to stand outside of the Christian and tempt or accuse through whatever manipulation he had of society or of the people around him or her. But it was my contention, and it still is, that Satan can devour Christians if we allow him, harass us at least at the level of the flesh which includes the brain and the thought processes and the thinking and the emotions just as Ephesians 4:27 says, "Do not give the devil a foothold." And that term "foothold" has the idea of a spot or space or locality from within the believers from which he has greater opportunity to supercharge, if you will, a confusion in the mind, a lack of clear thinking, certain types of sins.

And so as we approach this subject, there are just a few more perspectives.

First, we are battling an invisible foe, an invisible foe that has power to manipulate our society, the human race. And that makes it difficult for us. But again, it's all within God's limits.

Second, I will try to be as biblical as possible. There is enough confusion and hype about this subject without muddying the waters even more, I will attempt at least to try to clear them up as best I can.

Third, we will not be hunting demons. We'll deal with them as we face them in Scripture, or in the world around us, but we will not be pursuing demonic influence where there isn't any. We can do a lot just on our own with our own flesh and rebellion sometimes.

Forth, we will keep in mind God's sovereignty. Satan, himself, cannot go beyond whatever limits God has set for him, God is to be trusted in the midst of this war.

Fifth, there is nothing to fear from demonic forces, or from a study such as this. Jesus, Himself, said, "Do not fear those who can kill the body and then can do no more." I'll tell you who to fear. Fear God, who after the body has been killed, can throw into hell. God is much more fearsome to people who are on the wrong side including the demonic forces, than Satan is to us. Rather, as we learn about the utter lack of authority that Satan really has, and the complete and eternal victory that Jesus Christ has accomplished over him through the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and where he is now seated, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, that we will learn that we are one with that victory, and the teaching of this should give us rather than fear, a quiet confidence as we walk through these issues and just continue to face life in the years ahead and ministry in years ahead.