

Lesson #1

**Kingdoms in Conflict**  
**Confronting the Reality of Spiritual Warfare**

Introduction:

A. **Three Observations**

(1) ***As there is a kingdom of God, so, too, is there is a kingdom of Satan. And the two are in conflict.***

"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will **his kingdom** stand? . . . But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the **kingdom of God** has come upon you" (Mt. 12:26,28; see also Acts 26:18 ["the dominion of Satan"]; Col. 1:13 ["the domain of darkness"]).

(2) ***Few Christians fully realize the extent of Satan's influence. Nor do they understand their own authority.*** Two texts in particular make both points clear.

a. *1 John 5:19* - "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

Observe the contrast. Whereas the "whole world" is *in* the evil one, we who are "of God" (v. 19) are *in* God and *in* his son, Jesus Christ (v. 20). The point is that **everyone is in someone!** "John wastes no words and blurs no issues. The uncompromising alternative is stated baldly. Everyone belongs either to 'us' or to the 'world'. Everyone is therefore either 'of God' or 'in the evil one'. There is no third category" (John Stott, 194).

Note: what significance is there in the fact that this passage was written *after* the cross, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus?

This forever shatters the illusion of *neutrality*, the idea that so-called "good" people who are not Christians are neither for God nor for Satan, are neither in God's kingdom nor in Satan's. The fact is, all people, young and old, male and female, belong to one of two kingdoms: the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. If one is not "in Christ" one is "in the power of the devil," even if there is no visible, sensible awareness of being in the devil's grip. Thus, *not to serve God is to serve Satan* whether one is conscious of it or not.

**"IN"** = languishes in helpless passivity; lives under the influence, power, and under the authority of Satan; in his grip and subject to his dominion (cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 17:15; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-2). Apply this notion to the "whole world", i.e., to the financial world, business and industry, the stock market, the banking system, political institutions and parties, entertainment (TV, films, media, radio), sports, education, the family, the home, the neighborhood, civic clubs and social service organizations, country clubs, . . . everything! PT: ***there is a satanic global influence with which we must reckon.***

This is a stunning, shocking revelation. It takes one's breath away when the implications of such an assertion are unpacked. Indeed, it is a frightening revelation that could easily instill fear and dread were it not for another assertion that John makes . . .

b. *1 John 4:4* - "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

Christians are assured of victory over false prophets and heretics (*theological victory* - they have not succeeded in deceiving you; you know the truth and have rejected their lies). Why? How? Because "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world!"

Having contrasted Christians ("you") with the heretics ("them"), he now compares the spiritual forces who are *in* the respective antagonists. Yes, Satan is great, but God is greater! Yes, Satan is powerful, but God is infinitely more powerful! The "He" who is in the Christian = (1) God the Father (1 John 3:20; 4:12-13); (2) God the Son (1 John 2:14; 3:24); and (3) God the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20,27). John does not say "greater are *you*" but "greater is *He*". It isn't you, but *God in you* that brings the assurance of victory.

(3) ***People often respond to the call to spiritual arms in one of two ways: either with obsessive preoccupation (based on their focus on 1 John 5:19 to the neglect of 1 John 4:4) or with complacent indifference (based on their focus on 1 John 4:4 to the neglect of 1 John 5:19).***

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves [i.e., the demons] are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight" (C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 3).

In other words, it matters little to the devil whether you attribute the totality of evil to him or none at all!

## **B. Twelve Reasons why Christians are tragically ignorant of and dangerously ill-prepared for spiritual warfare**

### (1) *Ignorance of the Bible*

Many simply do not know what or how much is said on the subject, nor are they acquainted with the tactics of the enemy. Consider the ramifications for the Christian life, even its most routine and seemingly mundane affairs, of Paul's statement in Eph. 6:12,

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Consider the man who wrote this, Paul, whose life was a constant battle, so it would seem, against *people, flesh and blood*: Pharisees, angry mobs, Roman authorities, false apostles in virtually every city, disloyal followers, etc. Yet, according to Paul, his own war, no less than ours, was not ultimately against them but against unseen demonic forces. Ignorance of this fact has contributed greatly to the lack of preparedness on the part of most Christians.

### (2) *Irrelevance of the Bible*

Some regard what the Bible says as irrelevant for our day. Belief in Satan and demons, so they argue, is on a level with belief in the Loch Ness monster and the search for Bigfoot! Related to this is the obstacle posed by the ludicrous and comical way in which Satan and his demons are portrayed. It is difficult to get people to take the devil seriously when he is trivialized by both the church and modern society. Again, says Screwtape to Wormwood:

"I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that 'devils' are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that . . . he therefore cannot believe in you."

(3) *The victory of the cross*

Many are unprepared due to their belief that, since the victory of Jesus was so complete and comprehensive, one need only rest passively in the security of one's position in Christ rather than aggressively apply it on a daily basis. But one thing we will soon learn is that *protection against demonic attack is not automatic*. Simply being a Christian does not insulate you from demonic oppression. Compare Col. 2 and 1 Peter 5 . . .

(4) *The fear of imbalance*

Some do nothing, believing that *any* depth of study on the subject betrays a preoccupation with the demonic and is thus imbalanced. According to Timothy Warner, a lot of Christians "have become so accustomed to operating with no demonstrations of spiritual power that they are bothered by *any* demonstration" at all. In other words, to those who have seen virtually nothing, any seems like too much. Likewise, to those who have seen a lot, a little seems like none at all.

(5) *The fear of sensationalism*

Some believe that "stressing spiritual warfare might lead to an unbalanced, experience-oriented theology centering on the spectacular" (Arnold, 26).

(6) *Insulated life-styles*

Some people, good-solid-stable-buckle-on-the-Bible-belt-middle-class-American people, who have lived relatively docile and decent lives, find it hard to believe that any of this is necessary or helpful. Some have been heard to say,

"I've never encountered a demon or felt attacked by one. So why rock the boat? Surely Satan is more concerned with the gay community in San Francisco and the spread of voodoo in Haiti than he is with my routine struggles. Isn't he?"

This all-too-common mindset reveals how ignorant most are of the nature and extent of spiritual warfare. The latter touches our routine struggles in life no less than the Mt. Carmel confrontations we read about in Scripture. Arnold agrees:

"Spiritual warfare is all-encompassing. It touches every area of our lives---our families, our relationships, our church, our neighborhoods, our communities, our places of employment. There is virtually no part of our existence over which the Evil One does not want to maintain or reassert his unhealthy and perverse influence" (27).

The conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan encompasses how we use our money, what we watch on TV, how we raise our kids, the tone of voice with which we speak to our spouse, how we use our time, how we talk about our boss when he isn't listening, indeed, every aspect of our lives.

(7) *The Christian and demonization*

A principal reason for passivity and indifference among many believers is their belief that a Christian cannot be demonized. This conviction has lulled many into inactivity and a false sense of spiritual security.

(8) *The paralyzing fear of fanaticism*

The excesses and extremes of certain deliverance ministries have evoked a disdain that often leads to outright denial. Related to this is the belief by many that those who actively engage in spiritual conflict are emotionally unstable and theologically illiterate. My immediate response to the latter point is: So what? I'm not condoning emotional instability or theological ignorance, but what does that have to do with whether or

not spiritual warfare is a genuine threat? The issue is not what kind of people believe and engage in spiritual warfare. The issue is whether or not it is biblically true.

(9) *Compartmentalizing*

Others insist that spiritual warfare pertains largely, if not exclusively, to such things as ritualistic sacrifice, seances, ouija boards, tarot cards, and people such as Sean Sellers, Richard Ramirez (the California "Night Stalker"), Charles Manson, and Jeffrey Dahmer.

(10) *Western world-view*

Perhaps the most significant reason spiritual warfare is not of immediate concern to many Christians relates to their world-view. Spirit beings, whether angels or demons, are not a *functional* part of how they view the world and the way they live.

a. *Western world-view* = every effect has a physical cause; if you can't see it, touch it, taste it, smell it, or hear it, it probably doesn't exist; all phenomena can or eventually will be explained or accounted for scientifically; *reality* is material and mechanical; *if* there *is* a spiritual realm, it has no relation to or impact upon the physical realm.

Philip Johnson has defined scientific naturalism as "a story that reduces reality to physical particles and impersonal laws, portrays life as a meaningless competition among organisms that exist only to survive and reproduce, and sees the mind as no more than an emergent property of biochemical reactions" (*Reason in the Balance*, 197).

b. *Biblical world-view* = thoroughly supernatural; physical phenomena/nature are controlled by God; angels do his bidding; demons actively and energetically oppose his kingdom; miracles, physical healing, gifts of the HS are essential elements that constitute *reality*.

Clinton Arnold explains:

"The issue is often framed as a choice between accepting a modern scientific worldview or devolving into a gullible, uncritical acceptance of a primitive, prescientific worldview. Of course, this is not an issue of being scientific or not. It is an issue of whether we accept the predominantly naturalistic assumptions of certain understandings of science. It is in no way incompatible with the scientific method to give credence to a belief in a personal God --- or, conversely, to believe in the evil spiritual dimension" (24).

Notwithstanding what has been said, many Christians remain *functional deists*. They don't deny that God exists or that there is a spiritual realm in which angels and demons are active. They simply live as if neither God nor spiritual beings of either sort have any genuine, influential, interaction with them. God isn't dead, but He might as well be. Angels and demons might exist, but what does that have to do with my life?

(11) *Mission-field mentality*

If there is such a thing as spiritual warfare, so some argue, it happens only on the mission field in the non-western world. People actually say that "demons are only operative in areas of the world where the gospel has not yet reached or where idolatry is still prevalent. They infer that Satan is just not as active in the Christian West" (Arnold, 25).

(12) *The insidious power of pride*

Timothy Warner explains:

"With the secularization of our worldview, the reality of spiritual warfare has almost disappeared from our thinking; and rather than risk the scorn of our peers, we seek to have as little to do with

the world of demons as possible, being content to leave them in the realm of theory or theology. To bring them into everyday life would be to risk ridicule."

In simple terms, the affirmation of the biblical world-view relative to angels and demons carries a social stigma that not many are willing to endure. Acceptance with one's peers often becomes a more powerful incentive than orthodoxy.

### C. Where the Battle began: A study of Genesis 3

The conflict in Genesis 3 is important not simply because it was the first encounter between Satan and the human race, but because it is *paradigmatic of virtually all subsequent encounters* as well. This is not simply the beginning of spiritual warfare, this is the *essence* of it. Cf. Satan's confrontation with Jesus in the wilderness.

That the serpent is an animal is evident from the fact that he is twice compared to other members of the animal kingdom (Gen. 2:19-20; 3:14-15). Yet he is also quite clearly the instrument of Satan (see John 8:44; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The extraordinary nature of this beast and the nature of his attack is evident from several factors:

- 1) His ability to speak (it is interesting, however, that Eve was apparently not surprised that he spoke; in other words, his speaking is not represented as remarkable or unusual).
- 2) He possesses preternatural knowledge as seen from his statement to Eve: "Did God really say . . ." How does the serpent know about the prohibition concerning the forbidden fruit?
- 3) He claims to know more about the fruit than God has revealed.
- 4) He impugns God's character and motives by telling Eve, contrary to what God had said, "You shall *not* surely die . . ." He implies either that God is selfish or deceitful, or both.
- 5) The fact that the serpent/Satan approaches Eve rather than Adam points to his craftiness. Whereas some have suggested this was because the temptation had a sexual component, the best explanation is "that the serpent demonstrates his cunning by accosting the person who indirectly learned of the prohibition and who was, therefore, more vulnerable. . . . The serpent directs his attack against the one who, at least as far as the biblical narrative is concerned, had not actually heard God give instructions regarding the biblical fruit" (Sydney Page, *Powers of Evil*, 17).
- 6) The serpent's cunning is also revealed in his tactics. Rather than launching an overt invitation to sin he asks what on the surface appears to be an innocent question: "Did God *really* say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (3:1).
- 7) He speaks of "God" rather than "Lord God" (the latter being the way God is otherwise described in the context). Does this suggest an unfriendly, perhaps rebellious, attitude on the part of Satan?
- 8) The serpent exaggerates the extent of the prohibition and thereby suggests that God has placed unreasonable and unfair limitations on Adam and Eve. "Furthermore, the question casts aspersions on God's character and implies that it is the serpent, not God, who has the couple's best interests in mind. Underlying the question is the assumption that a created being has the right to pass judgment on the Creator" (Page, 17).
- 9) The serpent/Satan disguises his true intent ("follow me in forsaking creaturely dependence on the Creator; form your own opinion about truth without appeal to the revelation of God") by putting before Eve what seems to be a blessing ("become like God").

The two-fold curse pronounced on the serpent/Satan tells us much about him:

The first element in the curse is found in 3:14. The curse teaches "that the crawling of snakes and the way they flick out their tongues, as if eating, have symbolic value. Having exalted himself so as to sit in judgment of God, the serpent is condemned to crawl on his belly; having led astray those who were created from dust (2:7), he is condemned to live in the dust" (Page, 19-20). Boyd points out that "crawling on one's belly and 'eating dust' (something snakes do not do) were idiomatic ways of referring to defeat and humiliation in ancient Semitic culture (e.g., Mic. 7:17). Such references clearly refer to the loathsome behavior of snakes, but they do so metaphorically" (157).

The second part of the curse is in 3:15. The "offspring" of the woman is obviously the human race. If the serpent is indeed Satan, then surely his "offspring" cannot be limited to ordinary snakes but must encompass spiritual beings of a similar nature, i.e., angelic beings who, like Satan, fell from their original place of goodness.

Two issues must be addressed.

First is the statement, "he will crush your head" (v. 15). The antecedent of "he" is "offspring", a word that can have either an individual or collective reference. If it refers to an individual, the Messiah may be in view. If it is collective, the people of God are in view. The recipient of the blow ("he will crush *your* head") is clearly an individual. The collective sense is supported by Rom. 16:20, but the language in Genesis 3 is too ambiguous to be dogmatic.

Second, does the curse describe a decisive victory over the serpent or simply a perpetual conflict? Both actions ("crush" and "strike") are described with the same Hebrew verb (best translated "strike"). Still, though, the ultimate victory of the woman's seed is implied: (1) "First is the simple fact that the struggle is divinely ordained. If God instituted the conflict, we may presume that he will bring it to a resolution" (Page, 22). (2) Since a blow to the "head" is more likely to be fatal than one to the "heel", victory for the woman's seed is suggested. It must be admitted, however, that the emphasis of the text is simply on the battle, not its ultimate outcome.

Three final issues:

(1) There is nothing in the text to suggest that the serpent/Satan gained any new power or unique authority over the world because of Adam and Eve's sin. In fact, the only thing Satan is portrayed as experiencing as a result of this event is *cursing*! However, one must still explain Matthew 4:6; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

(2) There is no support here for the so-called "serpent-seed" doctrine, according to which the serpent/Satan had sexual relations with Eve. Support for this idea has been mistakenly derived from Paul's use of the words "pure virgin" in 2 Cor. 11:2 and his reference to Satan's "deception" ("seduction"?) of Eve.

(3) We learn from this narrative some of Satan's tactics (more on this later). Two brief observations are in order.

- Satan will always claim to know more about God than God himself has revealed. He will claim to have special insight into God's motives for a command or a prohibition that God himself has kept secret. In other words, he will sow seeds of doubt in your mind concerning God's goodness; he will lead you to believe that God has ulterior motives in what He does designed to deprive you of blessings you might otherwise experience. "God is not telling you the *whole* truth. He can't afford to."
- Rarely, if ever, will Satan confront you as Satan. He will almost always approach you indirectly, disguised as someone or something who/that is more likely to win your trust (e.g., when Peter opposed Jesus' going to Jerusalem in Mt. 16). He will come to you through something you hear or see, perhaps a movie, a lecture by a brilliant, articulate, but pagan professor, through a well-meaning friend, or as an angel of light. After all, if you knew it was Satan, you'd be less inclined to listen or say yes.