

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son

Part Thirteen - Sunday, June 19th, 2016, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1895

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Jesus Christ Died On The Cross To Disarm Principalities And Powers And Cancel Their Power Over Our Lives

Ephesians 6:10-13 - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

Numbers 23:22-23 - "God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox. [23] For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought!'"

Colossians 2:13-15 - "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. [15] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Each of these texts contains truth that needs to be related and balanced with the other two. In *Ephesians* Paul speaks of the ongoing battle with the powers of darkness. We don't run. We "**stand firm.**" These powers are engaged with believers in a particular way. They don't possess. The battle isn't with *indwelling* spirits.

Paul says these powers "**scheme.**" Their power lies in their ability to *deceive* and *lie*. Your bondage to the enemy is directly proportional to his ability to make you think untrue things true, or his ability to make you doubt and ignore things absolutely essential. But one thing is for certain, says Paul. There is an ongoing battle. The warfare, once understood, is very real. We need to "**resist**" the outward attacks of these lying spirits.

The second text, from *Numbers*, while much less known, is equally important for the body of Christ. Balak, king of Moab, is afraid because the children of Israel are encamped on the border of his land. The armies of Israel have just defeated the Ammonites and Balak imagines he's next. Balak sends for the prophet Balaam in order to have Balaam put a curse on the Israelites. After a long, convoluted process, Balaam finally comes to Balak and, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, tells him, among other things, that there is a serious problem - "**For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought!'**"(23:23).

This is profound. "**You can't stick a curse on people whom God has blessed. It won't work. It can never work!**" We're going to talk about these words more later on, but for now we take these two texts - one from Ephesians about the reality of spiritual warfare and one from Numbers that says there is no curse that can stand against the people of God - and we add the third text.

Colossians teaches so clearly that something dreadfully decisive has happened to those powers of spiritual darkness through the cross of Christ. These words don't *erase* Paul's words in Ephesians about the reality of spiritual warfare, but they do *define* and *explain* the nature of the warfare in stronger, clearer terms. The Colossians text says we can be absolutely certain of this - **Christ's death on the cross has disarmed principalities and powers and cancelled their power over our lives directly.**

"Well which is it, Pastor Don? Are we involved in spiritual warfare or are these dark powers defeated? Can they mess up our lives or are we blessed so that we cannot be cursed?"

And my answer is "**Yes.**" My answer is a wise Christian must learn to take *all* that the Bible teaches on this controversial subject and digest it with a mature mind. That's why we are going to look at each of these texts, particularly in light of the finished work of the Passion of the Christ.

We'll start with the foundational Ephesians text:

1) **SCRIPTURALLY DEFINED, SPIRITUAL WARFARE EXTENDS IN AN ONGOING WAY TO AREAS OF OUR LIVES WHERE WE DON'T USUALLY FACTOR ITS EXISTENCE**

Look at Paul's words carefully again - **Ephesians 6:10-13** - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

These words can be read in **two** ways, and until recently I only read them **one** way. The way I read these words is certainly correct, but, I have come to see, it is tragically incomplete. When I read these verses I saw Paul reminding me that there are invisible spiritual powers behind all the outward events that plague and wear down my life. There are enemies much **bigger** than the ones I see. The real enemies aren't physical and they aren't material.

All of this is, of course, true. But it's only **part** - and I don't think the **biggest** part - of what Paul is saying. I have recently come to see more clearly that these aren't just verses describing the **nature** of the battle as much as they are a reminder of the danger of **not thinking about this battle** in large, visible slices of my daily life.

In other words, I don't believe Paul was merely telling us that there are such things as the Devil and demonic powers. Rather, I think he was red flagging what can happen when Christians **lose sight** of the presence of these enemies - and here's the important part - when we lose sight of the presence of these enemies **in the small moral compromises we make almost naturally with the world around us**.

Let me explain. It has just recently become so obvious to me that, when Paul warns of the spiritual powers behind visible realities he **isn't** warning us about the occult, or seances, or witchcraft, or spiritism, or Satan worship, or fortune tellers, or psychic hotlines, or the like. In other words, Paul's not wasting ink warning the church about the link between the visible and the invisible where the connection is so **obvious** you'd have to be a self-destructive fool to miss it.

No. Paul's not doing that. I think that misreads the intent of the Holy Spirit in this famous text. Rather, what Paul **is** doing is warning the Christians that when they make compromises with the world around them - even when those compromises seem innocent, common, and totally unrelated to any sort of dark spiritual power - they are inviting spiritual deception and bondage, even when they don't **think** they are doing so.

This is what Ephesians six is all about. It's a wake-up call! When I make small concessions to increasingly demanding, common accommodations to self I am **not** just acclimatizing myself to the changing cultural times. I am surrendering myself to more than I know. I am bowing before dark spiritual powers, though I may not see, or even expect their presence.

This is why our warfare role is constantly described as **standing** - "**Having done all, to stand firm**" (6:13). What kind of war can you win just by standing? You win the war by standing because the temptation of the enemy is to **shift**, to **slide**, to **bend**, and finally to **bow**. Standing means you don't get **sucked in**. You stay in place. You don't **bow** to the enemy. **Standing** is the opposite of **drifting**. You resist the fluctuating standards of this dark age by standing in the truth of God's Word and the accomplished victory of Christ Jesus on the cross.

So we see that holiness, according to Paul, isn't just about **ethics**. It's not just about **rules**. And, for those younger, it isn't just about maintaining old fashioned standards. Paul reminds us not to miss what's happening behind the scenes - behind the **visible** events. It's about spiritual warfare you never see. It's about not bowing your knee to dark spiritual powers. People who would never dream of involvement with the occult embrace Satan's presence in common daily decisions. They don't **know** they do because they don't **see** his presence in the compromises they make.

Your life and mine are a constant daily dance with visible, material, physical realities and events. That's the part of life we **see**. We will become drastically weakened in our ability to resist temptation to the extent that we forget the one to whom we bend our knee when we offer **weakened resistance** to small visible compromises because the compromise seems **less than** joining hands with demonic principalities and powers.

This is Paul's heart-beat in Ephesians six. Spiritual warfare is *lessened* and *overlooked* when it is recognized only in the realm of the occult and victims foaming at the mouth. You and I *join hands with those same principalities and powers* in a thousand small compromises where we never even consider our surrender to them.

How many Christians would sit through some morally dark movie if they pictured themselves joining together in a group and praying something like this: *"Satan, we come into your presence. We offer our minds to you for these next two hours. Come and dominate our thinking and affections. Accomplish your purpose for this crowd in our hearts and lives. Amen"*

"Pastor Don, that's ridiculous. We'd never pray such a prayer."

Listen, that's Paul's whole point. You don't *have* to pray that prayer. That *is* what you are doing when you watch that stuff. There's more than just flesh and blood - more than just the visible events involved in your evening out. You *are* praying that prayer whether or not those words are even spoken. You just don't *know* you're praying that prayer.

Or how many Christians find the fellowship of the church becoming less and less a force in their lives through an overly aggressive and passionate commitment to sports and recreation. They never dream that the baseball team or the hockey league or the country club are *not* the only forces involved in that addiction. Those are just the visible components. You're presenting your life and your families' life at an entirely different altar.

Or how many Christian business people find it harder and harder to turn the work engine off and come together with God's people to worship the Lord and learn from His Word. The schedule seems to drive God to the edge of life *all by itself*. And people who can be brilliant in business can be as sharp as wet liver in seeing what's really happening and who's really behind it. Do you honestly think it's just IBM, or General Motors, or whatever the name of your own business is, that's pulling your heart away from Father God? Paul says, not in your life. You're bowing at an entirely different altar.

Remember Paul's warning. The strongest and deepest infiltration of the deception of principalities and powers takes place where Christians *aren't* thinking about the battle they're in. There are no *ordinary* moral compromises. You bow your life to dark powers when you ignore their presence in the outward choices of your life. Your *mind* will become increasingly darkened to truth and your *affections* will increasingly be turned away from the beauty and glory of Christ Jesus.

2) TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON THE REAL BATTLE OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE, WE HAVE BEEN FREED IN CHRIST FROM FALSE FEARS AND SUPERSTITIONS

It's at this point that I want to deal with the two other texts of this teaching:

I have seen something that concerns me greatly. I've seen it three times in the last month on religious television programs. I've seen Joyce Myers and John Hagee and Benny Hinn all call Christians to the front and pray for their deliverance from generational curses.

I wouldn't have been disturbed if they had simply prayed for people who were *afraid* they were victims of generational curses and explained to them that these fears had been answered to in the death of Jesus on the cross.

But that wasn't the case. This wasn't an *explanation* of what *Jesus* had accomplished for them on the cross. It was presented as the actual *moment* of their deliverance at the hands of the television evangelist.

It was at that time I began thinking about those wonderful, largely unknown words, from Numbers 23:22-23 - **"God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox. [23] For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought!'"**

There are two marvelous thoughts joined together. These people had been *delivered* from the bondage of Egypt. And *because* they are a *delivered* people, they can never be a *cursed* people. This wasn't because they were somehow *special* in themselves. They weren't always a morally superior people. They weren't the most numerous or powerful people. But they were a people redeemed and delivered by God. And simply because of that, they were *uncursable*. Is that a great truth or what?

"That's Old Testament Israel, Pastor Don. How can you apply that verse to the New Testament body of Christ?"

I apply it like this. The clear, repeated teaching of the New Testament is that any blessings applied to God's people in the Old Testament, while not always exactly the *same* in the new covenant, are, if anything, greatly *amplified and multiplied* through Jesus Christ for His church. This is not some *marginal* truth in the New Testament, but a *central* and *prolific* one. It is the central thesis of Paul's whole letter to the Galatian church:

Galatians 3:7-9, 29 - "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. [8] And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith....[29] **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**"

As the redeemed Body of Christ, we don't get *less* than Abraham. We get infinitely *more*. As redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus - bought at such great price - direct recipients of God's *best* covenant - we don't have *less* than the children of Abraham did under the old covenant. We have so much *more*. We are now *sealed by the Spirit of God* in a way not possible under the old covenant.

That brings us into the marvelous truth of our final text:

Colossians 2:13-15 - "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, {14} having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. {15} When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him."

We have already studied **verses 13 and 14** in this teaching series in detail. Our focus now is **verse 14**. When Paul thinks of the event of the cross - when he remembers how the debt of the broken law of God was paid up and silenced forever - he identifies the event of the cross in still another way.

When he refers to the cross he speaks of it as the time when God *"...disarmed the rulers and authorities...."* - because the chief tool of the enemy was the power he had to justly condemn us through the whip of the law we had truly broken - *and "made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Christ)."*

Jesus Himself saw this victory coming as He faced the cross - John 12:31 - "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out." The cross permanently changes the status of Satan. He is still here with us. His minions still do his bidding. But he fights and flails like a dragon with his head already chopped off.

Now we need to put all of this together. If Satan is a defeated foe, is there still such a thing as spiritual warfare? Yes, there is. But it is now warfare of a specific *kind*. Satan's power is exercised *not directly* over Christian people. That's why Paul says we need to stand against Satan's *wiles* or *strategies*. In another place he says we need to be aware of his *devices*.

He uses *means* to reach people he can't touch directly. The Bible says he can't touch you *directly* - **1 John 5:18-19** - "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and **the evil one does not touch him.** [19] We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

"The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Notice how John puts two sides of truth together in perfect balance. The whole *world* lies in the power of the evil one. And, at the same time, the ***"the evil one does not touch him"*** (the one born of God).

Aren't you so glad John didn't say ***"Greater is He that is in you than the other ones who are in you?"*** No. Only Jesus dwells *in* us by the Spirit of God. So, if the enemy is going to mess up my life as a child of God he must find some other way to *touch* or *gain influence* over my life. And he does this, with great success in many Christians' lives by *using the world* to capture my affections and thoughts. He can't reach me from the *inside directly* so he tempts and deceives and fascinates me from the *outside indirectly*.

So here, finally, we see where true spiritual warfare lies for the child of God. You don't have to live in fear of being taken captive by curses and spirits and demons. My Bible says Satan can't **touch** the child of God. Don't live your life bound in fear and superstition.

But you **do** need to engage your life in constant spiritual warfare. The battle is with the **world** as Satan uses it to do one of two things: **as he deceives you about the absolute truth of God's Word and trades it for the relativism of this age.** And secondly, **as he tempts you with temporary pleasures over the supreme and abiding glory of the will and way of God.**

Somehow we're missing this. We are actually living through a very strange time in the church (and society in general) where people are **more and more** interested in the supernatural and spiritual warfare and yet, at the very same time, are less and less interested in separation from the world and personal holiness. Either way, Satan laughs. And Christians are distracted from the real issues of spiritual warfare against the wiles of the Devil.

We sing about the power of the cross. But do you know what the power of the cross is **for**? It's not just power for **forgiveness**. It's power for **triumph**. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross. His direct power over my life and yours is broken. And that present **power** of the cross is manifested for a **purpose** in my life today. The freedom of the power of the cross is freedom to **renounce** Satan's temptations and **reject** his lies. This is how the cross is related to the issue of spiritual warfare today:

Galatians 6:14 - "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Let's make sure we stand confidently in the security Jesus' cross brings. And, at the very same time, let's make sure we're more alert than many about the daily battle with the schemes of the Devil.