



Spiritual Warfare

Part 5: The World And The Flesh

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After the last installment in this series¹, you may be hoping that our discussion of the forces allied against us is over. It is, after all, daunting when we consider that Satan and all his vast army is entrenched in their opposition to us. The last thing you want to hear is that Satan and his demons are not our only enemy! The truth is, we have two more!

When most people hear the words “spiritual warfare” they envision some sort of cosmic battle between angels or between humans and demons. Usually, they focus on Satan and his demons. When asked to name the Christian’s enemy, most would unhesitatingly answer, “The devil and his demons.” Though that answer is true, it is not complete.

We actually have **three** enemies, **not one**. Any consideration we give to the subject of spiritual warfare will be inadequate if we fail to understand and engage **all three enemies** simultaneously. We have taken the time to understand the powers and restrictions, and the abilities and inabilities of the devil in the previous article. Here we will consider the other two enemies that we fight: the world and the flesh.

The Danger of Ignoring the Enemy

One thing I like to do with my children is wrestle. We writhe around on the floor in the front room while I taunt and tickle and do everything in my power to not let any of them escape my clutches. They scream and laugh and try their best to fight back. When the kids were smaller, I could take on all four of them at once without a problem. That is no longer the case!

Occasionally, I would notice that one or two of the kids would stand off to the side, waiting for the perfect opportunity to attack. They wisely stayed just out of arms'

reach, keeping their distance, and patiently waiting. I soon found that all I had to do to invite an attack was to turn my back to the waiting child. By focusing all my attention on one of the other kids, those waiting in the wings sensed a weakness, a blind spot, an opportunity. They would quickly move in for the attack and try to get the upper hand.

This same scenario gets played out in the arena of spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is not a battle waged against one single enemy. It is a battle we wage against three separate enemies who all work in concert against the Christian.

If our focus is on only one of the three enemies, we will quickly find that we are losing the battle on the other two fronts. Too often, attention is focused on the devil and defeating him while the battle against the world and the flesh is neglected. *“As a result of being so preoccupied with only one phase of the battle, many Christians have suffered great infiltration on the fronts of the world and the flesh.”*²

Spiritual warfare is a threefold operation against the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we focus our efforts only in battling one of these three, we will find ourselves falling rapidly and losing the battle on the other two fronts.

The effects of being preoccupied with the demonic can be readily seen in the church today. A quick search for resources on spiritual warfare will turn up no lack of material; deliverance ministries, study resources, books, and tapes abound. Never in the history of the church has so much material been available to supposedly equip us for battling spiritual forces. At the same time, I dare say that few would argue that the church is winning the battle against the world and the flesh. Worldliness has not only infiltrated the church - in most sectors, it has entirely taken over.

¹ All the previous articles in this series are archived on our website at kootenaichurch.org.

² Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, Jr., *Overrun By Demons: The Church's New Preoccupation With The Demonic* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 61.

A love for all things temporal, an infatuation with relevance and acceptance in academia, political circles and pop culture, and a philosophy of ministry that caters to such worldly thinking dominates the modern church.

How are Christians doing in battling against the flesh? Are we beating that enemy? Hardly. Statistics show that professing Christians are just as likely to lie, cheat, divorce, view pornography, gossip, and cheat on their taxes as their pagan counterparts. Disunity, pride, self-centeredness, greed, and discontentment are not traits exclusively found among unbelievers. Doesn't this seem a bit incongruous?

The diagnosis of such a condition must come back to the fact that while seeking to do battle with Satan and his demons, most Christians have turned their back on the other two enemies. Consequently, the world and the flesh are winning victory after victory in the lives of believers. We may be fighting with all our might and standing strong against the wiles of the devil, but if we have adopted the godless thinking that characterizes the world while constantly living in the flesh, what is the point?

Only a balanced warfare against all three enemies simultaneously will ensure our victory. Let's familiarize ourselves with our other two enemies.

THE WORLD

By "the world," I do not mean, and Scripture does not mean, the individual people who make up the world. It is not world in the sense of "every person on the planet" like we would mean when we say "God so loved the world. . ."

By "the world" we mean the system of thinking, the way of life, the perspective of this world which leaves no room for God. It is the godless mindset composed of the "lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes," and the "boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:15-17).

You have probably heard people refer to "worldly Christians." Usually such a label is associated with certain activities such as smoking, going to movies, listening to certain styles of music, playing cards, or drinking a glass of wine. The biblical concept of worldliness has less to do with certain activities and more to do with certain ways of thinking.

Sexual immorality, drunkenness, revelry and the like 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 acts of the flesh.

Worldliness is a way of thinking, 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 humanistic, man-centered, prideful and self-sufficient.

Lewis Sperry Chafer described the world system this way: "*The cosmos [meaning 'world'] is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms us to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God - a civilization which none of its promoters really expect God to share, who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, and jealousies, [as well as] its education, culture, religions of morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live on this earth. It is properly styled **the satanic system**, which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so meaningful word 'cosmos'. It is literally a **cosmos diabolicus**.*"³

Whenever we think like the world, we are thinking exactly the way that Satan wants us to! We are told "**Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever**" (1 Jn 2:15-17).

James 1:27 says that "**pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.**" James rebukes those who fraternize with this enemy saying, "**You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God**" (Jas 4:4). The wisdom that is of this world "**is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic**" (Jas 3:15).

Christians are hated by the world because we are not of this world (1 John 3:1, 13). We should not love this world, but instead overcome it (1 John 4:4; 5:4) since the whole world system "**lies in the power of the evil one**" (1 John 5:19).

Winning Against The World

The often heard slogan in Christian circles is true: believers are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Believers do not belong to this world because we have been

3 As quoted by Ice and Dean in *Overrun By Demons*, 60-61.

chosen out of the world. **"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you"** (Jn 15:19). Having been born of God, the evil one cannot touch us (1 John 5:18-19) because we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

What then is our relationship to this world? Though we are not of this world (John 17:14, 16), we do live in this world (John 17:15). We are left in this world to evangelize it while we remain separate from it.

A number of New Testament passages speak of our separation from the world in our lifestyle and behavior. We are told to **"not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect"** (Romans 12:2).

The grace of God instructs us to **"deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, . . ."** (Titus 2:12-13). We are to **"keep oneself unstained by the world"** (James 1:27), and never wish or seek friendship with the world (James 4:4).

We have **"escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust"** (2 Peter 1:4) and **"have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, . . ."** (2 Peter 2:20).

When you **"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven"** (Matt. 5:16) then **"you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life"** (Philippians 2:15-16).

We separate from the world when we live and think differently than the godless system which permeates every corner of human thinking, society, culture, and conduct. Jesus was our model of how to live in the world while confronting the world system: *"Christ bore witness to the sinfulness of the world's conduct by demonstrating the moral perfection of God in His life; so also, by allowing the holy character of God to radiate in his life, the believer exposes the sinfulness of the world's practices, showing that they are contrary to God's holy character. Christ also bore witness to the truth by showing men who God is and what He requires of them; so also, the believer bears witness to*

*the truth, relating the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In these two ways the believer fulfills his responsibility of being a witness to the world."*⁴

We wage war on the world system by standing against its godless philosophies, speculations, and lofty, self-reliant thinking - bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The degree to which believers individually, or the church corporately, begins to adopt the world's thinking on marriage, ministry, truth, and all aspects of life and living is the degree to which they lose the spiritual battle.

Satan does not have to possess you in order to get you to do his will. He does not have to oppress, control or personally attack you. All he has to do is to get you to think and act like the world - and you are doing his will. Scary, isn't it!

THE FLESH

On June 29, 2010, a CBS headline read *"FBI: 10 Russian Spies Arrested in U.S."* Posing as innocent civilians in New York, Washington, and Boston, these ten Russian agents sought to infiltrate U.S. policy-making circles to gather intelligence about U.S. weapons, diplomatic strategy and political developments.⁵

According to the news story, *"These deep-cover agents are the hardest spies for the FBI to catch and are dubbed "illegals" in the intelligence world because they take civilian jobs with no visible connection to a foreign government, rather than operating from government jobs inside Russian embassies and military missions."*⁶

Few threats are feared as much as the traitor - a rebel within the camp. They work covertly to overthrow the government and subvert its interests. They can be far more effective than outside threats.

Just as nations have their traitors, spies, and rebels within the camp, so does the Christian have theirs - the flesh. The other two enemies that we face - Satan and the world - are both *external enemies*. Neither one of those enemies has the power to make any person disobey God. That which gives Satan and the world-system the opportunity to operate in the believer's life is the flesh.

Where Did It Come From?

"Flesh" is the word that the New Testament most often

4 Allan Maitha as quoted in *Overrun By Demons*, pg. 73.

5 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/06/28/world/main6627393.shtm> posted online as of October 26, 2010.

6 Ibid.

uses to describe the sin nature that is the ruling principle within all the fallen children of Adam. The moment that Adam sinned in the garden, he acquired a sin nature. It is a principle, an influence, a disposition to sin which completely rules the unbeliever. It is the desire to assert one's own will and authority over God in every area of life. It is passed on, at conception, to all of Adam's descendants.

Romans 8 is a key passage on the nature, extent, and influence of the sinful nature - the flesh. All who are in Adam are in the flesh and controlled by the flesh. Thus they **"cannot please God"** because they are **"hostile toward God"** and are not **"subject to the law of God"** (**Romans 8:1-17**). Apart from the new birth, the unbeliever has no new nature, no spiritual capacity to do anything pleasing to God. They are, thus, slaves of sin (**John 8:34**).

The flesh produces a wide range of sins and sinful activities (**Galatians 5:19-21**). The flesh also produces *good deeds* and seemingly *righteous acts*. None were more outwardly righteous than Saul of Tarsus (**Philippians 3:2-6**) and yet all his righteous activities were sinful because he was seeking to establish his own righteousness *apart from Christ* (**Phil. 3:7-11**). What is it that prompts someone to do religious activities in an effort to gain God's favor? The flesh.

Our Main Enemy

The clear teaching of the New Testament is that **the flesh not the Devil** is the major and most influential enemy that the Christian faces.⁷ The world is not our most powerful and influential enemy. The devil is not our most powerful and influential enemy. The flesh **is** our most powerful and influential enemy!

As Ice and Dean accurately point out, *"The 21 letters in the New Testament were written to address the important issues confronting Christians in this age, the church age. It is reasonable to expect that if anything is an important issue for the believer in this age it will be given a comprehensive treatment in these letters, and that if something isn't an issue it will probably be ignored."*

*"The silence of these letters in some areas speaks volumes. For example, demons (or evil spirits) are mentioned only ten times, and most of these simply relate to certain factual truths about demons. . . . On the other hand, in these same letters are over 50 references to the flesh as the primary enemy of the Christian (and "the flesh" is only **one** way that this sin nature is referred to). It is obvious that the New Testament perspective is that the major area of*

*conflict is in the arena of the flesh."*⁸

To quote one of my Bible College friends, "Satan doesn't need to tempt me to sin or make me to sin. My flesh is more than capable of causing my downfall." Yet, the bulk of spiritual warfare teaching today is aimed at conquering Satan - an already defeated foe.

Winning Against The Flesh

Though we once were slaves of sin and in bondage to the flesh, salvation has delivered us from the power of that sinful nature. **Romans 6:17-18**, **"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."** **Romans 6** is a key text in understanding and winning our war against the flesh.

Since we have been identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, our "old man" is crucified, dead and gone. We are no longer the person we once were in Adam. We are now a new creature in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).⁹ Though our old man (our identity in Adam) is dead and gone, the sin nature continues. We still have the struggle against the flesh. This is what leads to the struggle that Paul describes in **Romans 7** where we do the deeds we don't want to and do not do what we want to do. Though I am no longer "in Adam," and though I have been set free from the power of sin, there dwells within me a sinful nature, the flesh which wars against the Spirit (**Gal. 5:16-24**).

How are we to deal with this propensity toward sin, the flesh? Again, **Romans 6** is the key. First, we have to know that our old self was crucified with Christ and we are no longer slaves of sin (vv. **1-10**). We are to then consider ourselves to be free from sin, dead to sin (v. **11**), and to not let sin reign in our body by obeying it in its lusts (v. **12**). We must choose to believe that sin no longer has power over us and then live in light of that fact as though it is indeed true. We accept by faith, believing it true that we are no longer slaves to sin. Then we choose obedience and obey God and 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 what we obey. If we present ourselves as slaves of righteousness and choose to do righteousness then in obeying righteousness we become slaves of righteousness. If we choose to yield our bodies to sin, then we will become slaves to sin. The unalterable law of sanctification is that we are slaves of the

⁸ Ice, pg. 76-77. Emphasis in the original.

⁹ The "old man" refers to the person we once were in Adam before being saved: **Ephesians 4:22, 24; Romans 6:6; Colossians 3:9-10**.

⁷ Romans 7:14, 18; 8:1-17; Galatians 3:3; 5:13-21; Ephesians 2:3.

one whom we obey (**Romans 6:16**). **Romans 6:19**, “**For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.**”

It is a moment by moment, step by step, day by day, decision by decision walk. Our sin nature 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 (**Gal. 5:17**). The Apostle Peter tells us that the fleshly lusts wage war against our soul (**1 Peter 2:11**).

The Christian life is not lived on some mystical plain, free of this daily battle. We live our lives shackled to this body of death, this sinful flesh and we long for the deliverance that will come either at death or the Lord's return (**Romans 7:24-25; 8:18-25**).

The Puritans used to use a phrase that has unfortunately fallen into disuse: the *mortification of sin*. We *kill* sin. It is our enemy. We fight the fight, wage the war. We put to death the deeds of the flesh (**Romans 8:13**), resisting temptation, choosing obedience, waging war against the enemy within.

Their Cooperation

We have three enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil. These three work in concert with each other against the believer. To give you some idea of how they work together consider the following great illustration offered by Ice and Dean in their book *Overrun By Demons*:

“All unbelievers are in bondage to Satan, making them his unwitting allies against God. He makes them dance in harmony to the tune of the world-system.

This system operates similar to the way a radio station functions. Satan is the program director who selects the agenda for the station. The demons and fallen humanity produce the programming, which propagates and reinforces the agenda (false doctrine). The station then transmits the message over the air. However, you cannot pick up the station unless you have a receiver tuned to the right frequency. Fallen humanity is all tuned in to the radio station 'WORLD' with the volume turned all the way up. The receiver is the flesh, which is attracted to Satan's frequency. All three work in harmony: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The unbeliever's nature is sympathetic to the evil nature of the world-system, so the two are attracted. The main difference between the two is that the world-system characterizes the corporate expression of Satan while the

flesh embodies these same characteristics on a personal level. When an individual becomes a believer in Jesus Christ this alignment is broken and all-out war begins between the Christian and the world.”¹⁰

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¹⁰ Ice and Dean, 69-70.