



Spiritual Warfare Today

The Enemy

As I understand it, I was asked to speak on the topic of "spiritual warfare" because we are hearing more and more about this subject in the evangelical church. In the last number of years there has been a revival of interest in evil spirits and matters such as demon possession, exorcism or the casting out of demons and the different ways in which Satan and his demonic followers seek to oppose God and his people. Many have listened to Bob Larson's phone-in radio show and have heard him talk of demons and this spiritual warfare. There have even been programs during which a play-by-play description of an exorcism was broadcast. People hear this and they wonder, "What are we to make of this?"

And then there are Frank Peretti's popular novels, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. These are fascinating novels. I read them both last year on our vacation and I couldn't put them down. Each of these novels tells the story of a town in the process of being taken over by an evil conspiracy. What makes these books significant from the point of view of our subject is that they do not only tell the story of what is going on in the realm of human beings, but they also tell the story of the demons who are behind the evil conspiracy and of the angels who are trying to protect the people of God and foil the plans of the demons.

These books are like the book of Job in the Bible in that they tell the story of what is going on in the realm of the spirits as well as the story of what is going on in the human realm. In the first chapter of Job you have the story of Satan speaking to God and God allowing Satan to take away everything that God has given Job except his life. That is the story in the realm of the spirits. Then we read about what takes place on the earth when, as a result of Satan's influences, all of Job's wealth and even his children are taken away from him. That is what you have in the Peretti novels. The story takes place on two levels, the realm of humans and the realm of the spirits. Peretti imagines how the demons and angels in the spiritual realm interact with the human beings in the physical realm and so we see demon possession and fighting between angels and demons and we see how the prayers of God's people make the angels stronger and the demons weaker.

Many have read these books. Although Peretti is just imagining what the interaction between the physical realm and the spiritual realm might be like, and as far as I know, he is not claiming to be describing reality, he has caused many people to wonder about the world of the spirits and spiritual warfare, so that people are asking questions about demon possession, demonic schemes, exorcism, territorial demons and the like. In this first article, I will give a brief sketch of what the Bible teaches about Satan and his demons. This will give a framework in which to consider some of the issues that are being debated today and the Bible's teaching about the practice of spiritual warfare.

Satan's Origin

According to the Bible, Satan is a spiritual being of great, but not infinite power. Satan is a created being. There are many religions and philosophies which teach that good and evil are two equal, but opposing forces in the universe. The Bible, however, teaches that all that exists originates with God. Before God created, there was nothing but God. There were no angels; there were no devils; there was only the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In chapter 1 of John's Gospel we read, *All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made*. That means that Satan also was created by God. He is a creature of God.

That, of course, is very important, for it means that when we think of the warfare between God and Satan, we are not looking at a conflict between two equal forces. We are not looking at a conflict in which the two opponents are evenly matched. God is infinite. Satan is not infinite; he is finite. God is almighty; Satan is not almighty. Satan is mighty, but he is not almighty. There never is any question about who will win the conflict. Satan remains in existence because God allows him to remain in existence. If God wanted, He could simply command Satan out of existence. Satan is like a dog on a leash. He can do no more than God allows him to do.

It is important that we keep this in mind as we think about Satan and his kingdom of evil. Satan is indeed powerful, but he is no threat to God. We never have to worry that Satan will overcome God or that there is any doubt about the final outcome of the history of the world. The time is coming when Satan will be locked away forever and ever and when God will reign without opposition in the new heavens and on the new earth.

Satan's Fall

Satan is a creature of God gone bad. Satan was not created as an evil spirit. God did not create an evil spirit. When God finished His work of creation, He said that all that He had made was good. It was very good. God could never have said that had He created Satan an evil being. There was a time when Satan was good. As he was originally created he was good, but something happened. Somewhere along the line Satan became evil.

The Bible does not give much information about Satan's fall. It does speak of the fall of certain angels, presumably Satan being among them and leading them. In 2 Peter 2:4 we read, that, ... *God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ...* Similarly, we read in Jude 6, *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

Many Bible scholars believe that two Old Testament passages, Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-19, speak of the fall of Satan by way of typology. We will look at Isaiah 14:12-15 briefly. It reads as follows:

How art thou fallen from heaven O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground which didst weaken the nations! for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the side of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell to the sides of the pit.

This passage refers, in the first place, to the king of Babylon, but many believe it has a deeper meaning as well. The king of Babylon is thought to be a symbol of Satan. This is similar to the way in which the king of Israel, for instance David, can point to Christ. Here the king of the enemies of the people of God points to the ultimate enemy of the kingdom of God, namely Satan.

If this is so, this passage indicates that Satan became proud and instigated a rebellion against God and thus was cast out of heaven. The Ezekiel passage is similar and is interpreted similarly. Whether or not, however, these passages are to be interpreted in this way, it is clear enough from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 that Satan and his demons were originally good angels who sinned against God and thus were cast out of heaven.

Satan's Goals

What is Satan and his evil kingdom doing here on the earth? Satan and his demons are enemies of God, but what are they trying to accomplish? The Bible shows that they are opposing God's plans and purposes on the earth. They are trying to encourage all that is evil and discourage all that is good. We see this in the story of the fall. Before the fall of Adam and Eve, the world was a perfect place. It was beautiful in every way. Every part of the world declared the glory of God. Adam and

Eve lived in a beautiful harmony with God. There was nothing bad. There was nothing ugly. There was nothing evil. But then Satan enters the picture. What does he do?

He tempts Adam and Eve to join him in his rebellion against God! He tempts them to rebel against God and the result is destruction and devastation. The beautiful relationship with God was destroyed. The entire creation felt the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve and the result was death and disease, disharmony and destruction. That is what Satan accomplished. He wanted to destroy any thing that brought glory and honor to God. He wanted evil, ugliness and disharmony.

Satan is the ultimate vandal. Vandals destroy things for the sick pleasure of destroying them. Vandalism makes us angry because it is so senseless. We can better understand theft. At least thieves are trying to get something for themselves, but vandals usually have no other motive than a desire to destroy, to deface and to hurt. It gives them pleasure to think of the hurt they will cause. That is what Satan is like. He gets a sick pleasure from destruction, pain and suffering. He wants to deface anything that glorifies God. He wants to take all that is beautiful and make it ugly. He wants to turn happiness into sadness. He wants to turn laughing into crying. He wants to turn pleasure into pain. That is what Satan is like. That is clear when we consider the results of the fall and all that the Bible teaches about him.

Satan's Methods

How does he do this? Satan does it in all kinds of ways. He tried to do it by tempting the Lord Jesus to sin in the wilderness. His goal there was to stop Jesus from saving His people from their sins. Had he been successful, no one would ever have been saved and all men would have been condemned to hell forever. What we see in Satan is pure malice. He is full of hatred and he would love to see all of mankind suffer with him forever in hell.

The Bible also shows Satan causing sickness. In Acts 10 we are told the story of Peter and Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Peter gets a vision of the clean and unclean animals and he goes with the servants of Cornelius to Caesarea. In his sermon to Cornelius and his household Peter describes Jesus work as follows: *Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil.* This does not mean that all sickness is caused by Satan and his demons. When we compare the rest of the Bible, it is clear that not all sickness is caused by Satan, but from this verse we see that there are times when Satan causes sickness. We see this same thing in the story of Job, where God allows Satan to cause Job to become sick.

There is a lot more that Satan does. We cannot go into all of them. He tempts people to sin (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thess. 3:5). He is behind the persecution of believers (Rev. 2:10). He tries to pluck away the seed of the word of God when it is sown (Matt. 13:9). He tries in other ways to hinder the progress of God's kingdom. His whole purpose is to promote evil and suffering and to hinder God Who promotes the good and the joy of His people.

Satan's Defeat

There is one more point we need to consider to have a balanced understanding of Satan and his evil kingdom. The Bible teaches that Satan and his evil hordes were defeated when Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead. In the second part of 1 John 3:8 we read, *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Another verse which teaches the same thing is Hebrews 2:14, which states that Jesus became flesh and blood, *that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.*

One of the purposes of the death of Christ was to destroy the devil, and this Jesus accomplished. In Colossians 2:15 we are taught that, *having spoiled principalities and powers, he (Jesus) made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.* In this passage, the words *principalities and powers* refer to Satan's dark domain. So we learn that Jesus triumphed over Satan by his death on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead.

But right away we wonder: why is Satan still so active if he is defeated? The answer is that God has seen fit to allow a certain period of time between Satan's defeat and his utter destruction. The relationship between Satan's defeat and his complete destruction is often compared to the relationship between D-Day and V-Day in the Second World War. D-Day was the decisive battle in the Second World War. After D-Day, victory for the Allies was only a matter of time, but it still took a number of months until V-Day. It still took quite a time before the war was over. We can compare Jesus' death and resurrection to D-Day. Once Jesus had died and risen again, the great and decisive victory had been won, but there is a time between the great victory and the end of the war. In that period Satan is still allowed to be active. The Bible tells us that he is bound, but also that he is allowed to pursue his evil ends. We are still waiting for V-Day, the day when Jesus will return on the clouds of heaven and lock Satan and his demons away forever and ever.

This does not answer all the questions that we may have about why God allows Satan to wreak so much havoc in the world, but it does give us a Biblical perspective on Satan and his kingdom. It is a defeated kingdom. It is a kingdom whose final destruction is certain. It is a kingdom which has been conquered by King Jesus. It is very important that we realize this when we think about Satan and his demons and their activities. They are powerful and they are to be taken seriously, but our Lord has defeated them. Their final destruction is certain.

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