

SPIRITUAL FORCES: WORSHIP AS WARFARE

August 27, 2017 | Pastor Randy Remington

This is part two of our series that we are calling “spiritual forces”. Interestingly, this is the type of subject that is easy to under-emphasize and yet we want to be careful not to over-emphasize. The scriptures, and Jesus himself, will describe a dimension that some of us might not even know exists. The surprising lesson that we might learn, is that this world is actually more real than the realm you and I call home. So let’s dig in and be safe in the confines of his eternal Word.

THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Why is this subject so important? Because it is about a spiritual dimension and realm and reality that the scriptures speak very directly and clear about?

Randy illustrated this by pointing to the belief (until the late 1800’s) of “spontaneous generation”. In fact, the ancient Greeks believed that small animals such as worms, mice, and maggots sprang to life automatically from the non-living matter around (such as rotting flour, a sweaty shirt, or decaying meat). French scientist, Louis Pasteur, developed the microscope which gave humanity the ability to look into a world (invisible microorganisms) that at that point were unseen. It was realized that these were the culprits behind the diseases of the day. They were alive in the air, but they weren’t created by the air. Out of this evolved the “germ theory”. Some would argue this was one of the most important medical discoveries in the history of the world.

This revelation of this once unseen world, caused them to change their medical practices. They now washed their hands and sterilized their surgical equipment and they separated infectious patients from one another. But you can imagine the skepticism of people of that time period. “You want us to believe that there is an invisible world and things we can’t see are wreaking havoc in our world”?

What is the point? “What you see is not all that there is”, there is more than what we see. What is true in micro-biology, is true spiritually.

SEEING THE IMPACT AND RESOURCES

The spiritual realm is impacting the physical realm; the impact will affect:

- Relationships
- Our thinking
- Our world-view
- Our attitudes toward marriage, morality and finances
- How we do business

It shapes and impacts everything about us.

Some of us like the Jesus who loves and feeds the poor, but he was very clear on this subject. He would refer to the devil and demonic spirits as literal beings. He would begin to unmask and expose who Satan is and what he is like. He would confirm the reality of angelic beings and much more in this unseen world.

The challenge is for us to acknowledge what Jesus and the scriptures show us about this world and arrange our lives and live differently. A good example of this would be a scripture we looked at last week in 1 Peter 5:8-9:

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

“We are impressed with God, but we are also aware and alert to the devil’s tactics and schemes”

“In the western cultural, Satan’s biggest strategy is to convince people of his non-existence”

We learned that Satan markets in pride, arrogance and deception.

There is a story in 1 Kings 6: 15-17, where the prophet Elisha had a young man he was mentoring. This young man was alarmed in the morning as he saw an enemy army had encamped and surrounded them during the night. He wakes Elisha up and tells him, Elisha prays:

“Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

It would be awesome to be able to “pull back the curtain” and see the spiritual realm. Although we would probably be shocked at what we see. The truth for most of us is, we could see this clearly by looking through the “review mirror” of our lives. We can see the wreckage and carnage of our past and realize there was more in play that we might not have been aware of.

But on a more global level, all you have to do is look at things going on in our country and throughout the world and we see the evil influences at play.

Jesus instruction on “the Lord’s prayer” gave us an important peek into this subject: **“We are forgiven of sin, but delivered from evil”.**

What is unseen is more real than what is seen; this world was created out of that world.

“STOIKHA-ON” “ELEMENTAL SPIRITUAL FORCES”

“Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules...” (Colossians 2:20)

The phrase we see in Colossians, “elemental spiritual forces” is actually one word in the original Greek: “stoi-khā'-on”. Understanding this word helps us understand what Paul is trying to communicate to us. It is used and refers to the “basic materials which things were made”, so in this verse it literally means “the elements”.

An example, for us today would be the alphabet that is the “stoikha-on” (the basics) or foundation of our language and communication. Paul is saying, there are spiritual forces at work in this world. These forces are shaping people and causing them to act a certain way. They also exist to shape culture and community in certain ways.

We may even see this influence in our own family history. Patterns of abuse, addiction and many more; there is probably something “elemental” at work there.

The church is supposed to be an embassy of heaven in the world. The church is meant to be an outpost of another kingdom... “may your kingdom come”. Jesus builds his church by calling us out of the “stoikha-on”. We have been called out from the shaping, molding, and conforming that is happening. We enter his kingdom and then he sends us back into the world, to bring his rule and his kingdom there.

Make no mistake Jesus is building his church. We see this in many nations, but none more clear than in China. In the 1940’s China removed all missionaries from the country and setup a government that did not give space for Christianity or the Gospel. Today China has more believers than any other country... Jesus is building his church and the “gates of hell” (spiritual forces of this world) will not be able to stand against it!

This same dynamic can exist in families, companies, a system of education, the entertainment modes and means, and governments political strongholds. Evil will influence institutions and systems more than individual people. There’s something powerful in agreement, both in a positive sense of worshipping and serving the Lord or in walking and living in opposition to God together as a group or institution.

KNOW THY ENEMY

The following verses speak to the origin of Lucifer; Satan. I hope you see:

- that he has a beginning
- he does have power but it is a limited power
- he is not in control, God is in control

But we need to also realize that we get to walk in his victory and get to be enforcers of that victory...

“greater is he that is within you than he that is in the world”.

Understand, that:

“we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”.

“How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: “Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a wilderness, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?” (Isaiah 14:13-17)

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.” (Ezekiel 28:12-17)

He was a created being, but we also know that he was beautifully created. He took his eyes off of the creator and put them on himself. The created began to be filled with pride. Ironically he began to desire the very praise that he was made to lead others in toward God. He lost his position and was cast low.

GOD HATES PRIDE AND ACTIVELY RESISTS IT

“But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:6-10)

The real meaning of this scripture is that he hates pride and “he will take up a position of battle against you”. Because of pride, he is saying “I’m going to go to war with you”. You will not succeed when you’re walking in the same spirit of the enemy. We can know very clearly if we have aligned in his rebellion.

Remember the words of Lucifer before his rebellion: “I will make myself like the Most High”. When our pride begins to take our eyes off of the Most-high and we begin to believe we rule, we make the calls, then we have fallen into the same trap as Lucifer and Adam and Eve. In Lucifer’s arrogance he lost everything, so did Adam and Eve and we do also.

The opposite of pride is not humility; you can be a “humble atheist”.

The opposite of pride is worship.

THE ANSWER TO PRIDE IS WORSHIP.

You can't be a worshiper and be proud, we look to Jesus and say "yours is the kingdom, yours is the power..." I'm serving in your kingdom, your purposes and for your glory! Only one can be on the throne of your heart, God is the focus and recipient of our praise.

Remember worship is more than just singing; our worship happens when our lives are totally devoted to God and his kingdom. When you worship (live) this way you are on the offense. Satan can't get a foothold. You're breaking the power of the spiritual forces at work; don't underestimate the value of this.

Remember we talked last week about how Satan wants to break you away from the herd so he can take you out. But he can't take us out together, we are his family and we are the church. Only the church has God's light and truth and in contrast to the concentration of sin and rebellion we get to be a concentration of righteousness, a "stronghold of righteousness". Only the church has the message of deliverance. Only the church has the truth that will set the captive free.

Let's be people who bring God's kingdom into our work place, our neighborhood, etc. It will only take 2 or 3 gathered in his name and his kingdom comes; he is there with us.

"Worship as warfare" ...more to come!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As we begin to look at our "worship as a weapon", please review the first section the "seen and unseen". First we recognize that all of us are at different places in our walk with Jesus and our understanding. Did the illustration of the unseen world of microorganisms give you clarity on this subject? What has been your thoughts about the unseen spiritual world to this point and what is it now?
2. Next let's look at "seeing the impact and resources". Think about this, if this was just theoretical and had no impact on our lives or world it might be an interesting conversation. Please discuss what we see in this world (or specifically in our lives) that shows the impact of the unseen world. (positive and negative)
3. Still in the same section, please discuss what 1 Peter 5: 8-9 teaches us. Also discuss this quote: "We are impressed with God, but we are also aware and alert to the devil's tactics and schemes"
4. We see this phrase in Colossians, "elemental spiritual forces". We learned that is actually one word in the original Greek: "stoi-khā'-on". What does Colossians teach us about "the elements"? We see on page 4, that when we see patterns of abuse, addiction and similar things, there is probably something "elemental" at work there. Discuss what you have seen in people, communities, cities, where we can see the results of the "elemental spiritual forces" at work.
5. What do we learn about Lucifer, Satan?
6. We see that "God hates pride and actively resist it". Review James 4 again, what did we learn about pride in our lives and how God will respond?
7. "The answer to pride is worship" what does this mean to you?