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Warfare Prayer Ephesians 6:10-20

I want to begin this message by directly addressing an issue that people frequently bring up when the subject of spiritual warfare is before us. Here in Ephesians 6 we have been told that our battle, our struggle, is not ultimately with other human beings but with rulers or principalities and authorities and cosmic powers, all of which we know to be a description of Satan and his demonic hordes. We have been repeatedly exhorted to stand firm. The way we do it, as we saw last time, is by adorning ourselves with the armor of God, described in vv. 14-17.

But here's the question people pose. *Couldn't God simply dispense with all of this by immediately destroying Satan and all his demons?* That is to say, people often wonder why God doesn't just annihilate Satan and his demons immediately. If he did we could ignore Ephesians 6. Better still, there would have been no need for Paul to have included it in his letter to the Ephesians.

Could it be that he is giving Satan and demons time to repent? Are we asked to be patient with Satan's presence because there is always the possibility that at some time in the future he might come to his senses and turn from evil and cry out for God's forgiving mercy? No. The consistent testimony of Scripture is that Satan and his demons are irredeemable. They cannot and will not repent. Jesus didn't die on the cross for angels, but only for men and women (see Hebrews 2:14-18).

So, again, why doesn't God eliminate Satan altogether, right now? He *could* certainly do so. After all, God is omnipotent and Satan is only a creature. God made him and God can certainly destroy him. Satan exists as do we all, by virtue of God's sustaining power. God upholds Satan in existence the same as he upholds us and all of creation.

We also know that God certainly has the *right* to destroy Satan. The moment Satan sinned he was subject to judgment. That Satan continues to exist doesn't mean God can't or that God shouldn't destroy him. He can, and he most assuredly has every right to do so.

Furthermore, not only is God *able* to remove Satan, not only does he have the *right* to remove Satan, we also know from Scripture that he *will* judge and remove Satan forever. We know that it is God's ultimate purpose to cast Satan and all his demons into the lake of fire. We know this from several texts. In Matthew 25:41 Jesus himself referred to "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (see also Jude 1:6). And we read in Revelation 20:10 that Satan will eventually be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever.

So, it wouldn't be unjust for God to consign him there *now*. It wouldn't violate any principle of fair play or be inconsistent with what we read elsewhere in Scripture concerning Satan. There is nothing in the removal of Satan and his demons that would be contrary to God's character or his purpose for human history. So why does he remain in place? Why does God permit him to continue hurling his "fiery darts" at Christians around the world? Wouldn't the Christian life be immeasurably easier if God were to eliminate Satan altogether?

Someone might even point to the petition in the Lord's Prayer where we are instructed to ask God not to lead us into temptation but to deliver us from the evil one. The "evil one" is Satan. So if we are to successfully avoid temptation and be delivered from Satan, the simple solution would be for God to remove him altogether from the scene, right now. So why doesn't he?

The first thing you need to know is that the Bible doesn't provide us with an explicit answer to this question. I wish it did, but it doesn't. So we are left to piecing together an answer that makes sense of Satan's on-going existence and activity.

One answer to this question is found right here in Ephesians 6:18-20. But before I tell you what it is, let's consider what the apostle Paul said at the end of Romans 11. This is only one passage that grounds our answer in who God is

and what he is doing in human history. We read this in Romans 11:36 – ***“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”***

What this declaration by Paul tells us is that everything that exists, exists because God caused it to exist. All things are ***“from him.”*** And everything that continues to exist, exists because God wills that it exist. All things are ***“through him.”*** And most important of all, it tells us that everything that exists, exists in order to glorify and magnify and make known the greatness of God. All things are ***“to him”*** or ***“for him,”*** which is to say, they came into being and continue in being ***so that God might be honored and praised.*** And that certainly applies to Satan and his demons.

So what this tells us is that God permits Satan and his demons to exist because in some way their existence and activity serves to bring greater glory to God than if God were to immediately judge them by casting them into the lake of fire.

How can this be, you ask? Again, I don't have specific biblical texts, but I do believe that my answer is thoroughly biblical.

For example, God knows that when you and I are confronted with temptation and we turn to his grace and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to say No to what Satan and his demons are up to, it brings him more glory and honor than if we had never been tempted at all.

God knows that our growth into spiritual maturity that comes when we battle Satan and resist his temptations and trust in God's mercy and forgiveness will produce more opportunities for God to be seen as kind and sufficient for all our needs than if Satan were nowhere present and not at all involved in our daily struggles.

Consider how the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus more greatly magnify God ***because*** of Satan's presence than if Satan were absent. When the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary and became the man Christ Jesus, Satan turned all his efforts to destroy him (see Rev. 12:3-6). But he failed. And in that failure God's greatness was magnified.

When Jesus resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness, the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit in him and the sufficiency of all that the Father provided him were together put on display more so than if Satan had never had the opportunity to tempt our Lord.

We are told in Colossians 2:15 that when Jesus was nailed to a cross “he disarmed the rulers and authorities [i.e., the demonic hosts] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in it,” that is, in and through the cross itself. In other words, Satan and his hosts evidently thought that by conspiring to nail Jesus to a cross they could defeat God's purposes. But Paul says that Jesus subjected himself to the temptations and taunting of Satan and eventually to the shame of crucifixion itself precisely because in this way his grace and glory in forgiving sinners could be put on display. The consistent testimony of the NT is that there is more glory that will come to God because of the suffering of Jesus than would have come had Jesus avoided the cross by immediately annihilating Satan and his demonic hordes.

Furthermore, when you and I are supremely satisfied in the goodness and beauty of God rather than in what Satan offers to us by way of temptation to sin we more clearly demonstrate God's glory and greatness than if we had never been confronted by Satan at all. When you love and trust Jesus in spite of what Satan offers, God's glory shines more clearly than it would have had you never been confronted or tempted by the enemy.

If God were to destroy Satan and all demons right now it would surely magnify and draw attention to his ***power***. But God wants to do more than merely put his power on display. He is determined to magnify his ***superior beauty and transcendent worth*** and to show to all concerned that he is deserving of our trust and that he alone can satisfy our deepest desires. When God works in us to win our love and allegiance to Jesus as we resist and say No to the deceptive lies of the Enemy, God is greatly glorified.

What all this means is that God is determined to defeat Satan in stages, progressively, rather than in one decisive act. This is God's strategy because it will serve more to glorify his greatness and beauty than any other approach.

The *first* stage was the incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh. You may recall that according to Revelation 12 Satan made every effort to destroy Jesus at his birth. We know this because King Herod, Satan's accomplice, sought to kill all the new-born boys in Bethlehem. The *second* stage was when Jesus resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness. The *third* stage was when Jesus cast out demons from those who had come under their oppressive influence. The *fourth* stage was when Jesus disarmed and humiliated the demonic hosts by his voluntary sufferings on the cross for sinners. The *fifth* stage is when he brings men and women to saving faith in himself. The Apostle Paul said that the purpose of his mission to the Gentiles was "to open their eyes, so that they may turn . . . from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Here is how John Piper put it:

"Without sin and law to condemn us, Satan is a defeated foe. He is disarmed. Christ has triumphed over him, not yet by casting him into hell and nullifying his influence on earth, but by letting him live and watch while millions of saints find forgiveness for their sins and turn their back on Satan because of the greater glory of Christ" (John Piper).

In other words, when by God's grace men and women turn to Jesus it exposes the ugliness of Satan and highlights the beauty of Christ.

The *sixth* stage is when we, by God's sustaining strength and by our use of the armor he has provided, resist Satan's temptations. The *seventh* and final stage is when God will put all of his attributes on display at the final judgment of Satan when he is cast into the lake of fire forever and ever.

You might say, "***But that is a very costly way of gaining glory and honor for himself. The sufferings of Jesus were a pretty steep price to pay for God to be glorified.***" Yes, but our great Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, determined that it was worth the cost.

I can hear some of you saying to yourselves: "But Sam, you make it sound like ***it's all about God***, that it's all about what makes *him* look good, that it's all about what serves more effectively to magnify *him* and *his* greatness." Well, yes! The God-centered answer is always the best and most biblical. That's what Romans 11:36 is all about.

Others of you might say, "***But I don't agree with that approach.*** I don't think God should run the world in this way. I don't think God should make his own glory preeminent in his decision regarding Satan and demons." Well, there isn't much I can say to that other than to say: Personally, I would rather trust the wisdom of an infinitely wise and omniscient and good God than to trust the wisdom of a finite creature such as yourself whose wisdom is stunted, whose heart has been corrupted by sin, and who obviously is very, very far from being omniscient! No offence intended!

So, what this means to you and me is that we need to be extraordinarily diligent to obey what Paul says in Ephesians 6, that we must take up arms against the Devil and stand firm! ***Be glad in God, be satisfied with all that he is for you in Jesus, and say No to Satan and his demons and in doing so show God to be immeasurably glorious and sufficient for all your needs.***

Now, all that being said, I believe there is yet another reason why God doesn't immediately destroy Satan. And as I noted earlier, that reason is found right here in our passage. The victory that we achieve over the Enemy will only come about by means of perseverance in prayer. In other words, ***it is only as we turn to God in prayer, over and over and over again, that we overcome Satan's seductions.***

Think about it. ***Why does God command us to pray?*** Why utilize prayer as the means for our victory in spiritual warfare? Couldn't God shut down the Enemy without our asking him to give us strength and power and wisdom and the incentive to stand firm in our faith? Yes. ***But prayer magnifies him more.*** Prayer puts God on display as the only one worthy of our devotion and trust.

When you are laid up, sick and helpless, and you need someone to clean your house and mow the grass and bring food to your kitchen so you can eat, and someone who cares about you answers your phone call for help and says, "Of course, I'd be delighted to help," who gets the glory? Not you. You're weak and helpless and all you did was to

call for the assistance of another. *The glory and praise goes to the one who rushes to your side and in generosity and kindness provides you with all you need.*

That is why God wants us to pray during seasons of spiritual attack. It magnifies him as the one who comes to our aid. It honors him as the only one powerful enough to pull it off. It shines a light on his mercy and all-sufficiency to do for us what only he can do.

I think God ordains prayer during spiritual warfare for another reason: he wants us to *partner with him* in securing the victory. When by God's grace we stand firm by praying at all times we gain far more joy and satisfaction than if we did nothing at all. God doesn't say to us: "Stand over there and do nothing." He says: "Come to me and ask for all the resources and spiritual strength needed to defeat your Enemy."

The principle here is that except on rare occasions God will not intervene to give you daily victory unless you ask him to. If Paul believed that God would give him strength, clarity and courage to preach apart from the intercessory prayers of the Ephesian church, he would never have written vv. 18-20!

Let me say one more thing about the relation of vv. 18-20 to what we've already seen in vv. 10-17. Contrary to what some have said, prayer is not the seventh piece of spiritual armor. Nor is it the way we wield the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God). Grammatically, both "praying" and "keeping alert" (v. 18) are connected with the verb "stand" all the way back in v. 14. In other words, prayer is what characterizes and permeates the whole of the Christian soldier's activity: "Take your stand, praying . . . Put on the belt of truth, praying . . . Put on the breastplate of righteousness, as you pray . . .," etc.

Prayer is the power behind the armor. Prayer is what makes the armor effective in battle. You will probably have little success in putting it on and standing firm if you fail to pray as Paul exhorts us to pray in vv. 18-20.

The Four "All's" of Prayer

Our approach to what Paul says here will be to highlight the four times he uses the word "all".

(1) **We are to pray "with ALL prayer and supplication"** (v. 18a).

In other words, prayer is not monolithic. It is not all the same. There is a wide variety of prayers that God calls upon us to employ. The different kinds/types of prayer available to us include:

silent prayer, audible prayer, public prayer, private prayer, both short and long prayers, prayer with fasting, prayer with feasting, prayer with praise, petition, intercession, rebuke, doctrinal praying, emotional praying, prayer in tongues, resisting-the-enemy praying, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of confession, prayer for healing, prayers for help, prayers for courage, etc.

As prayer pertains specifically to spiritual warfare, consider six forms it may assume:

First, there is prayer for ourselves and others to be given insight and understanding into who we are in Christ and what is ours through faith (Eph. 1:15ff.). Knowing who you are in Jesus, knowing what he has accomplished for you by his life, death, and resurrection, is a powerful weapon to use in your battle with the enemy. The reason is because Satan will always lie to you about who you are. If he can undermine and sow seeds of doubt in your mind about what Christ has done in making you into a child of God, he can win.

Second, there are prayers of resistance and rebuke of the enemy. For example:

"Satan, I rebuke you in the authority of Jesus Christ. I declare your works in my life destroyed. Jesus triumphed over you in the wilderness, on the cross, and in the grave. His resurrection has sealed your fate. I triumph over you now in the strength of his name. I resist and rebuke your efforts to oppress, afflict, or deceive me. I remove from you the right to rob me of the joy and fruit of my salvation. Through the power of the blood of Calvary, I command all powers of darkness assigned to me, sent to me, or surrounding me now, to leave. Go where Jesus Christ orders you to go, never to return" (Tom White, 116).

Third, there are prayers of protection in which we ask God to shield, guard, and support us.

“Lord, I commend and entrust _____ into your watchful care. May your glory surround and protect him/her. May you drive away the enemy and deliver him/her from all evil and temptation and every attack of the evil one.”

Fourth, there are prayers for the places where you go, stay, live (especially when traveling or in a strange location). I will never forget when I first met Jack Taylor. I picked him up at the airport in Kansas City and I dropped him off at his hotel. He insisted that I come with him to his room. He said he never takes up residence in a hotel room, no matter how short the stay, without praying. He asked me to get down on my knees with him and he prayed:

“Father in heaven, would you by your Spirit cleanse and purify this room. Whatever sins have been committed here, I ask that I be shielded from any and all defilement. Whatever evil spirits were invoked or may have taken up residence in this room, by the authority of Jesus Christ I command that they leave. If pornography was viewed in this room, or if adultery was committed in this room, I ask that you drive away all lingering spiritual influence that may have come as a result. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen!”

Here is another prayer to use in your home or any other place where you may spend extended periods of time:

“Lord, I claim this place for your purposes. I stand on the truth of your Word: 'The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous' (Ps 125:3). I believe you have given me this place. I dedicate it to you, and ask you to fill it with your holy presence. I separate myself from any iniquity that has occurred here in past times. I apply the power of Jesus' blood to remove any desecration of God's name in this place. I ask you, in Jesus' authority, to set watching angels around this property for your purposes, protecting your servant from the work of the evil one" (Tom White, 118-19).

Fifth, there is prayer for those afflicted and oppressed when you are ministering to them. A few things that you might wish to pray are:

- (1) that the demon(s) afflicting this person would be prevented from communicating with other demons or with Satan himself;
- (2) that the Holy Spirit would confuse and weaken the grip that any and all demons might have on this person;
- (3) that the person would be strengthened in his/her faith to understand their position and identity in Christ and to trust and obey the Word, even if their feelings or experience might be different from what Scripture says about them;
- (4) that the person may be able to distinguish between his/her thoughts and feelings and the thoughts and feelings of demons; in other words, pray that the individual might have discernment to know the difference between their own ideas and those ideas suggested to them by the Enemy;
- (5) that God would protect and guide his child and set angelic forces at work to break up every scheme of the enemy (adapted from the writings of Fred Dickason).

Sixth, there is prayer for angelic support, ministry, and protection. If that sounds weird to you, may I remind you that after Jesus had been tempted by the Devil himself, we are told that “angels came and were ministering to him” (Matt. 4:11). We are told in Daniel 10:10-21 that an angel was “sent” (Dan. 10:11) to Daniel to give him understanding in God’s purposes. The angel “touched” Daniel and “strengthened” him (Dan. 10:18). He told him, “fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage” (Dan. 10:19). And Daniel responded by saying, “as he spoke to me, I was strengthened” (Dan. 10:19; see Acts 12:5-8).

Don't be obsessed with "how" you pray. It betrays the assumption that prayer is a kind of religious formula or magical incantation that requires just the right words to prevail. People often think that the wrong words will anger God or frustrate him and provoke him to say "No" to their requests. Remember Romans 8:26ff.

(2) **We are to pray "at ALL times in the Spirit"** (v. 18b).

I find it instructive that Paul used the same phrase, "*in the Spirit*," to describe his regular practice of praying in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-19). But whereas tongues is certainly included in what Paul meant here, there are numerous other ways in which we pray "in the Spirit." For example: (a) we are to pray as the Holy Spirit prompts us. Listen to his voice. Be sensitive to his leading regarding what you should ask God to do. We are (b) to pray in the strength and power the Holy Spirit supplies. Perhaps we should ask for a fresh infilling of the Spirit's presence before we pray. We are also (c) to ask the Holy Spirit to remind us of truths in the Word relevant to the matter at hand. And (d) we must always ask the Holy Spirit to cleanse our minds of sin and fill them with purity.

(3) **We are to pray alertly "with ALL perseverance"** (v. 18 c).

Simply put, never give up! Never quit! Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17)! Don't let physical exhaustion get the better of you. Don't be discouraged. Don't grow weary. Resist the temptation to think that God isn't listening or worse still that he doesn't care.

(4) **We are to pray for "ALL the saints"** (v. 18c).

Everywhere, for everyone. Out of sight, but never out of mind or heart. Observe Paul's need for this (vv. 19-20)! Paul generally closes his letters with a request for prayer for himself (see Rom. 15:30-32; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; see also 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19). "Like every nervous preacher, he desires 'the liberty of the Spirit to express it (i.e., the gospel) freely, clearly, and boldly'" (Peter O'Brien, 487).

So, let's pray!