



Spiritual Warfare:

Fight The good Fight

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
8 Studies For Small Groups On Spiritual Warfare

Fight the Good Fight

Coming to understand that we are in a spiritual battle,
and knowing how to fight it

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Introduction

When we think about the year 1812 in the UK, it usually means that Tchaikovsky and the famous “1812 Overture” come to mind. However, if you say ‘1812’ to an American or Canadian, they think of something very different. In that year Britain and America went to war following months of political tension caused by the British impressing American Sailors on the open seas into the Royal Navy against their will. The “War of 1812” lasted 32 months from June 1812, and for the British was particularly problematic as they sought to fight the Americans in the west and Napoleon in Europe at the same time.

The most well-known battle of the War of 1812 was the battle of New Orleans which took place in January 1815. One of the reasons it is a bit peculiar is that it took place two weeks after the war had finished! In those days, news travelled so slowly that the armies in the southern States hadn’t heard the war was over. Around 5,200 soldiers and sailors became casualties in a battle that took place simply because the combatants didn’t know that the war was over.

Many Christians today become casualties in our spiritual war against Satan for the opposite reason: they don’t realise that **there is** a war going on! Our western world view has relegated the notion of Satan and the devil to the fringes, and even if many Christians believe he exists, they don’t acknowledge the real danger he still is today. He is seen as a powerless, semi-mythical figure that we don’t need to concern ourselves with in the modern world. However, even a cursory reading of the New Testament will confirm that the writers were very clear that Satan exists and is a real danger. The Apostle Peter wrote, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8). That notion of the devil being someone who prowls around comes from the Book of Job where we read, “The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.”

Jesus himself took the power of the enemy seriously and in the Lord's Prayer he taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." A more correct rendition of that line would read "...and deliver us from the evil one."

In his book, "The Real Satan", the American theologian James Kallas writes:

"A war is going on! Cosmic War! Jesus is the divine invader sent by God to shatter the strengths of Satan. In that light, the whole ministry of Jesus unrolls. Jesus has one purpose – to defeat Satan. He takes seriously the strength of the enemy."

I have shied away from teaching about spiritual warfare over the years for a number of reasons, not least of which is the over-fascination some people can have with the subject. However, I am aware that both the church and many individuals have been under spiritual attack over the last couple of years, and I feel that now is the time to look at this subject. To understand spiritual warfare we will need to study who our enemy is, what power does he have, how much influence does God allow him to do in our lives, and who we are in the fullness of the victory of Christ. We need to understand the completeness of Christ's victory at the cross and our place as adopted children of the King. That is quite a wide ranging brief, and for that reason this series will last for 8 weeks. I hope and pray you find it useful in your walk with Christ and your stand against the devil.

God bless you.

Roger Grafton.

Footnote: Some of these studies are a little longer than the norm, and you might want to skip some questions or spend more than one week on apart of a study. That is OK!

Spiritual warfare is serious subject which the enemy does not want you to understand or be effective in. I strongly suggest that you spend time in prayer for each other and worship both before and after each study and ask for God's covering and protection both in the study time and during the week that follows. I will be praying for you too!

1. Cosmic War!

At any one time I will usually have 2 or 3 books 'on the go.' I have one or two books on my study desk which I am reading, maybe another in the bathroom and one on the bedside table. Almost invariably, one of them will be a book about naval history and particularly the Royal Navy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. I love the fiction of Patrick O'Brian, C.S Forester, Alexander Kent and Sean Thomas-Russell with their tales of daring-do in the age of sail.

I recently read about the escapades (and the escape) of *HMS Juno* during the winter of 1793. A few weeks earlier the Royal Navy under the leadership of Admiral Hood had captured the French city of Toulon. The city had risen up against the excesses of the French revolution and sided with the British in their fight against the Jacobins. However, a certain French artillery officer by the name of Napoleon Bonaparte had other ideas, and after a vigorous campaign he managed to chase the British out of the city and recapture it. Unfortunately, *HMS Juno* was at sea during these events, and didn't know the city and harbour at Toulon was back in French possession. On the night of 11th January 1793, it sailed peacefully into the port not knowing it was in enemy hands! The unsuspecting *Juno* entered the 'Petite Rade' harbour, spoke to the French, came under fire, ran aground, was re-floated and escaped with no casualties, some damage to her rigging and 2 enemy 36-pound cannonballs wedged in her hull. Later, her captain wrote, "If we had known the enemy was so close nearby we could have avoided a great deal of anxiety." I think that is called typical British understatement.

Do you know you have an enemy nearby? Could you avoid a great deal of anxiety in your spiritual life by acknowledging that the devil is real and he has a desire to harm you? Many Christians don't seem to even know that we have an enemy. In this first study in this series we will see that the Bible says that not only is the devil real, but that he is evident in scripture from Genesis to Revelation and his plan is to separate you from God.

Read Genesis 3:1-24

- ✘ “The Devil really exists and should be taken seriously by Christians.” Discuss!
- ✘ If you have a Study Bible in your group, get someone to read aloud any note that appear for 3:1. How do the notes describe the serpent?
- ✘ List the consequences to Adam and Eve of them listening to the serpent. You should be able to find at least 6!
- ✘ What are the consequences for the serpent? Verse 14 and 15 list 5 of them. According to verse 14, how long will these consequences last?

Read Revelation 12:7-12 and Revelation 20:1-3

- ✘ Satan, the Devil, the Enemy and “the Serpent” appear throughout the scriptures from Genesis 3 near the beginning of the Bible right through to Revelation 20 at the end. He is clearly significant in the story of Scripture. How much teaching have you had on the Devil over the years? If your answer is, not a lot’, why do you think that might be?
- ✘ The devil is called by nearly 50 different names throughout scripture including ‘Abaddon’, ‘the accuser’, ‘your adversary’, ‘Antichrist’, ‘Apollyon’, ‘Beelzebub’, ‘the evil one’, ‘the Father of lies’, ‘the god of this age’, ‘Lucifer’, ‘Tempter’, ‘thief’ and ‘The wicked one.’ Why do you think he has so many different names and descriptions?
- ✘ Going back to Genesis 3, how are God’s words in Genesis 3:15 fulfilled in Jesus?

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 and 1 Peter 5:8-9

- ✘ How are we called to engage in the fight against the Devil? Paul repeats it 4 times in this passage and Peter also mentions it once. What does it mean?

- ✘ What are we to take our stand against? What (or whom) are we not battling?
- ✘ If you see a sign which says, “Warning: danger of electrocution” or “warning: slippery floor” it is usually because there is a real danger. Why do Peter and Paul warn us of the Devil’s schemes?
- ✘ In practical terms, what do you think each piece of Paul’s armour of God represents? How do we put them into action? How can you ‘stand’ better in this coming week?
- ✘ Is there anything you would like prayer for in particular before this group session ends?

2. Kingdoms in Conflict

In 2012 I had the amazing experience of being flown to Nepal by Tearfund to experience their ministry in that country. Nepal is a tiny, landlocked country sandwiched between China and India, and because of the geography and politics had been fairly isolated until recent times. In 1768 Nepal became a unified single country under the rule of a King, and until 2008 was known as either “The kingdom of Nepal” or “The Kingdom of Ghoorka.” For many years the country was a ‘closed kingdom’ which strictly controlled its borders. It was only in 1954 that King Mahendra rescinded Nepal’s isolationist policy and brought the country into the UN and the World Postal Union.

However, this tiny, isolated Kingdom has known conflict, war and civil war for almost all of its history. Through the 1700’s it was at war with China; in the early 1800’s it was the turn of the British to go to war with Nepal which ended with it becoming a protectorate of Great Britain; In the 1940’s India supported King Tribhuvan, when insurgents had attempted to depose and replace with his infant grandson King Gyanendra; from the mid 1980’s until 2006 there was a vicious civil war and in 2001 there was a royal massacre in which Crown Prince Dipendra reportedly shot and killed ten people, including his father King Birendra.

Nepal is a country which Tabernacle has strong ties with at through the Bowdler family, Christine Haggitt, Dot Evans and now the Douglas family. We often think of Nepal as a small, peaceful kingdom perched on the edge of the beautiful Himalayas. In fact, it is a kingdom which has been at war for most of its history in one form or another. Many of us just don’t realise that there has been so much conflict there.

Central to this idea of ‘cosmic war’ which I spoke about in the introduction to

this series is an understanding of Kingdoms in conflict and particularly the Kingdom of God. In this study we will look at the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of the enemy and the ongoing war between the two.

Read Matthew 4:17, Matthew 8:11-12, Mathew 10:7 and Matthew 6:9-13

The notion of the 'Kingdom of God' or the Kingdom of Heaven' were absolutely the central theme of Jesus' ministry and preaching. Jesus spoke about the kingdom; he urged people to repent because the kingdom was at hand; his parables were often about the kingdom (the Kingdom of God is like...) and he spoke about who could enter the kingdom and who would be excluded. The word "Kingdom" occurs 163 times in the New Testament, and the word 'King' or ruler over that kingdom a further 70 times: It is very important!

- ✘ What do you think the 'Kingdom of God' is? How would you describe it?
- ✘ What do you think the differences between earthly kingdoms and the Kingdom of God are? What are the similarities which will help us understand it?
- ✘ Sometimes Jesus talks about "The Kingdom of God" and sometimes "The Kingdom of Heaven." Do you know why the two different names are used? Are they talking about the same thing?
- ✘ In Matthew 16:28 Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God which is coming. In Matthew 3:2 he says that the Kingdom has come near. In Luke 17:21 Jesus says that "The kingdom of God is within you (KJV)" and in the Lord's prayer Jesus teaches us to pray for the Kingdom to come. How can something be here already, close by and yet also still to come? Theologians talk about the Kingdom which is "present and not yet." How do you think that can that be?
- ✘ Where is the Kingdom of God now and what is it like? At the end of time when Christ comes again, where will the kingdom be and what will it look like?

The Greek word which we translate as 'Kingdom' is the word "Basilea." It

means the royal power, kingship or rule of a king or those things which are subject to a king's power. It does not necessarily relate to a physical territory, but to those things and places which fall under a king's authority or power. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, he is talking about people and places which are subject to his kingship, not physical territory you could point to on a map. (This has interesting implications when we come to think about Israel.) When you obey the will of God and do his will, the kingdom of God is present. When you do the works of the Kingdom, you bring the Kingdom into that situation. When we choose to disobey God or sin, we step outside of the rule and reign of God, and depart from the Kingdom... hopefully temporarily.

Read Matthew 12:22-32, John 12:31 and Ephesians 2:1-5

- ✘ In these verses Jesus talks about the kingdom of Satan. Where do you think the Kingdom of Satan is? What does it look like?
- ✘ Satan is described as the 'prince of this world' and 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air.' What do you think this means? God made the world and is the rightful king, so how can Satan be the prince of this world?

In Genesis we read of how God created the world, placed mankind in it and delegated authority and dominion to us to rule in his stead. (See Genesis 1:26, Psalm 115:16, Revelation 22:3-5). God intended us to reign, and at the end of time when all things are put right, we will once again reign 'for ever and ever.' However, at the fall we surrendered our sovereignty and authority to the Devil: he stole what was rightfully our birthright through temptation and sin. The Kingdom of the enemy is a usurped kingdom stolen from us by a thief!

Think of it like this: In 1939 Holland was a sovereign country with its own democracy and royal family. However, in May 1940 it was invaded by the Nazis who placed it under occupation. A great darkness fell over Europe; the royal family fled and the Germans assumed all power and authority in the country illegitimately. The Dutch royal family and parliament were still the genuine authorities, but their power had been usurped. For the next 4 years there were heroic acts of resistance, small groups of people who fought back against the occupiers and occasional raids across the Channel

from Britain - but it was not until after liberation in 1945 that the enemy was finally defeated. At that time, authority was rightfully restored. However, between the invasion of Europe by the allies in 1944 and the end of the war in 1945 there was another year of bloody, costly fighting.

In a similar way, the earth was created and we were given authority and dominion over it. However, at the fall Satan 'invaded' the creation and occupied it. He usurped our authority and became the 'prince of this world' illegitimately. From time to time God's people would say, "we are not going to live the world's way anymore, but seek to live God's way." In a fallen world these are relatively isolated acts of resistance which bring light into darkness. At the incarnation Christ came and invaded the world (think of D-Day!) He brought God's rule and reign wherever he went and established a church to represent his Kingdom in the world. D-Day has happened, but the war is not yet over; we live between the ages – the kingdom has come and is still coming, and like an army of resistance fighters we are called to live the life and values of the kingdom, resisting the enemy in a cosmic war.

- ✘ How does this picture of warfare help your understanding of the war between God and Satan?
- ✘ How do we fight in war like that? What are our weapons?
- ✘ When I was training at Sandhurst Military Academy, we were taught how to carry out 'section attacks' (armed assaults on a defended position by a small group of soldiers). We were taught the importance of having clear objectives. What is the objective of our raids and attacks on the enemy in these time 'between the ages'?
- ✘ What is the difference between attack and defence in any war? Are we on the defensive as God's children, or are we on the attack?
- ✘ **Read 2 Timothy 2:3-5.** What are your objectives as a soldier of Christ this week?

3. The Tools of the Enemy

Last summer when we were in Africa we had many interesting and challenging experiences. One of the most challenging, especially when we got out to the rural villages, was the food! Levels of poverty, hygiene issues, and the strange variety of things that Ugandans eat all meant that whilst we were well looked after, we were often still hungry at the end of the day. Towards the end of our stay in the south of the country we took a half day break to visit the source of the River Nile. The boats which took you to see the source (an underwater spring which bubbles to the surface on Lake Victoria) set out from a hotel called 'The Kingfisher Resort.' The resort is still quite dilapidated and run-down and is actually quite rough, but compared to the city and countryside around it is an oasis of luxury! There was ample food, and whilst the water in the showers was cold, at least the soft drinks were too. There was a swimming pool and a secure terrace to sit on to enjoy the view of Lake Victoria whilst sipping a Coke (strictly no alcohol during our time in Africa!) On the opposite side of the river Nile from where we were was another resort called 'Eden' which was even posher than Kingfisher. One of the sadnesses was that we knew that a very short distance away were people living in real poverty as we enjoyed a break and a cold Coke.

To understand the tools and tactics of the enemy Kingdom we need to travel back to Eden and Genesis chapters 1-3 again to see how it all started...

Read Genesis 1: 24-31

- ✘ The first of the two creation accounts in Genesis gives a detailed description of how God created all things and in what order. What did God think of his creation?

- ✘ In verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21 and 25 God sees the light, land, vegetation, day/night and livestock and says that it is 'good.' However, in verse 31 God looks at 'all he has made' and says that it is 'very good.' What do you think this extra praise means?
- ✘ God says that what he has created was 'very good'. How could it have been improved or made better?

In this perfect creation we see that there was no hunger (1:29), thirst (2:10), conflict (2:24), sickness or death. Adam and Eve lived together in harmony, and communicated freely with God (1:28, 2:23). However, after the Fall we see a very different picture.

- ✘ **Read Genesis 3:1-12.** In these verses we see Satan's deceit and humanities' corruption. The first consequence is separation from God. The second consequence is separation between people and the third is sweat and labour which God had not ordained. Where can you see these three consequences in this passage?
- ✘ Where can you see them in the world today?
- ✘ The next result we see is God declaring war on Satan, followed by pain and suffering for people, sweat and toil, hunger, death, loss of innocence and a more dramatic separation from God. Look through the second half of Genesis chapter 3 and identify these features. Again, where do we see them in our world and community?

This gives us a list of the repercussions of the Fall. What had been perfect is now corrupted and spoilt. However, we know that is not the end of the story (more of that in a later study!) and one-day creation will be fully restored. However, in this age between the first perfect creation and the second perfect re-creation, we live with the ramifications of disobedience and sin in our world. Satan still uses these same tools to try and corrupt God's creation and the weakness of our flesh means we often co-operate with his plans: separation from God, divisions between people, hunger, pain, suffering, sickness, the inappropriate sexualisation of relationships between men and women, overpowering desires even when we know this might lead to pain were all things which came in through Satan's scheming but which God had NOT intended in his perfect creation. Even death came as a

consequence of the Fall, with an eternal separation from God.

- ✠ Look again at the list of things which came about as a result of the fall. Next session we will look at how God fights back against Satan in the war he declares on him in Genesis 3:14. But to end this week's study, can you think of ways in the Bible that Jesus battles against these things? What about us? How can we get involved in the battle?

4. Counter-Attack

I love all history, but I especially love military history. ‘Serious’ historians think that military history buffs are a bit of a joke, but conflict and war have been so central to human history that it bears a lot of study. My family have to put up with excursions to historic sites and battlefields wherever we find ourselves on holiday, with shelf after shelf of military history books and DVD’s at home and with a TV which is regularly tuned to documentaries or films chronicling the world’s history of fighting and conflict.

Because I am a bit of an anorak about these things, I know that last January saw the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. This was a major German offensive against the Allies in France, Belgium and Luxembourg to try and slow down or stop the liberation of Europe which was happening following on from D-Day. On 21st December 1944 the Germans launched a massive surprise attack through the Ardennes region of Belgium which caught the Allies on the hop. Initially the Allies retreated before the Germans, then dug in and held their positions and then on New Year’s Day 1945 they began a counterattack which pushed the Germans back and eventually destroyed much of their field army and equipment. Before they were ready to begin their counterattack the Allies took nearly 2 weeks to re-organise, slow the enemy down and begin their own offensive operations. This meant that the besieged defenders of Allied positions had to go through an extended period where they wondered when help would arrive.

At the Fall Satan invaded God’s perfect creation and wrought much havoc and destruction. As we saw in the last study, his offensive brought much suffering and pain into the world. However, God soon began his counterattack and the put the eternal plan of redemption into action. He began to fight the enemy at all his points of attack, and eventually the enemy will be pushed back and completely destroyed. However, in the meantime we might find ourselves feeling as if we are surrounded and besieged and wondering when help will arrive!

Read Luke 4:14-30

- ✠ This passage is known as 'The Nazareth Manifesto' and describes Jesus' first act as he returns from the wilderness where he has battled against the devil (Luke 4:1-13). Luke 4: 1 tells us that Jesus was 'full of the Holy Spirit' and Luke 4:18 tells us why the Spirit is on him: the word 'because' gives us the purpose for Jesus' anointing. According to verses 18-19 the Spirit is on Jesus to minister to four separate groups of people. Who are they?
- ✠ Jesus says he has come to deliver five blessings or ministries. What are they?
- ✠ Can you think of specific scriptures which relate to the fulfilment of these promises in Jesus' ministry?
- ✠ Read Matthew 11:4-5. Why do you think Jesus sends this message to John rather than answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no'?

Read Luke 4:33-35 and then Mark 4:35-41

- ✠ When dealing with a demon, Luke tells us that Jesus 'rebuked' (the NIV uses the words 'said sternly' instead of 'rebuked') and told the demon to 'be quiet' (again, the NIV translates this poorly and says 'come out of him.'). When Mark describes Jesus calming the storm he uses the words "rebuked" and "be quiet" as well. The same Greek words are used to cast out a demon and calm a storm. Why would Jesus use exactly the same words to do both?
- ✠ What power do you think Jesus saw behind the demon? What power was there behind the storm? Why was a natural force trying to stop Jesus cross the lake? If there is a malevolent intelligence behind the storm trying to prevent Jesus crossing the Lake, what might its plan be? What event immediately follows the calming of the storm which Jesus' enemy might want to avoid?

Jesus came not just preaching that the Kingdom of God had come, but demonstrating it too. We saw in the last study that Satan and the Fall brought certain curses and sufferings into the world:

- Separation from God in this life (Gen 3:8)
- Divisions between people (Gen 3:12)
- Hunger (Gen 3:19a)
- Sexualisation of relationships (Gen 3:16b)
- Revolt of nature against us (Gen 3:17-18)
- Pain, suffering and sickness (Gen 3:16a)
- Death (Gen 3:19)

Jesus came and fed the hungry, commanded nature to behave, healed the sick and suffering, released the demonised from Satan's power, raised the dead (and ultimately defeated death with his own death), restored a relationship with God both in the life and the life to come, brought unlikely groups of people together and preached unity (zealots and tax collectors were sworn enemies; men and women didn't mix in Jewish culture; Samaritans were 'enemies that Jesus met with in John 4) and Jesus had relationships with women who were not family members but based on something other than sex – he taught Mary and Martha and the woman at the well and raised up the woman caught in adultery, which was astounding in that culture.

In this light Jesus' ministry takes on a whole new light: he is not just feeding the hungry and healing the sick out of compassion, but he is also doing it because he is directly confronting the enemies' kingdom. Jesus is "forcefully advancing the kingdom" (Matthew 11:12) and is 'the strong man' plundering the enemies goods (Mark 3:27). Feeding the hungry, bringing Good News to the poor and getting alongside the marginalised and the oppressed becomes acts of Kingdom warfare!

- ✠ How do we join this battle today? In what ways might we combat separation from God in our own lives and the lives of others? What about hunger, or divisions between people? Loneliness and isolation or suffering? Inappropriate sexualisation or natural disaster? What is the place of world famine relief, the food bank or Arcot House? What about Green issues or being advocates for peace? How do we join this battle for God's creation today?

5. Our Battle

I said in the introduction to the last session that I love history. That love also encompasses church history, which I find quite fascinating. However, there is much in our history as Christians to be ashamed of. Right from the beginnings of the church there has been conflict and division. Even before the closing of the canon of scripture we read that there was a 'sharp disputation' between Barnabas and Paul which led to them parting company (Acts 16:39) and Paul tells us that he had to "Oppose Peter to his face" in Galatians 2:11. In the Second Century there was theological disputes between the mainstream church and 'heretics' such as Marcion, Montanus, Arius and Pelagius which led to them all being thrown out of the church along with their followers. All of these characters are worth looking up to see their work as they struggled to help the church develop its early theology and doctrine!

Once Christianity became accepted and powerful after the time of Constantine, one of the first things it did was start oppressing others who didn't share their beliefs. The church which was once the victim of persecution became the persecutor,. However, instead of excommunicating heretics in the way it had in the Second Century, it put them to death! After the Reformation (which was bloody in the extreme in some places) the continent descended into the 'European Wars of Religion' which lasted 125 years and saw Christians torturing, persecuting and killing each other. Whilst we may not be quite as violent in the church today (in general!), we are still very good at falling out, separating, saying that other groups 'are not proper Christians' and generally being schismatic. If Christians can find a way to fall out, they will... and Satan loves it!

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 (again!)

- ✘ Who or what is our battle against?
- ✘ Who or what is our battle NOT against?
- ✘ What are most fights about in church today? How do people carry out those battles?
- ✘ Remembering that one of the Devil's tools that we saw in the last chapter was division between people (typified with the division of Adam and Eve when Adam tried to shift blame to Eve after the Fall), what do you think the devil's tactics could be for attacking the church and making it ineffective today?
- ✘ In the context of spiritual warfare and the enemy's tactics, why do you think unity is such an important concept in the Bible?
- ✘ Off the top of your head, give some scriptures which highlight the need for unity and love in the church.
- ✘ When you find yourself fighting a brother or sister in Christ, whose work are you doing?

Read James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-9, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

- ✘ 'Resist', 'stand firm', 'be on your guard', 'be courageous' and 'stand your ground' are all defensive postures: we are not attacking the enemy, but standing firm against him. Armour in the form of a shield, helmet and breastplate are also defensive in their nature. Why do you think these passages about spiritual warfare are all about being defensive and standing?
- ✘ If one of the tactics of the enemy is to divide people, why is 'standing firm' and defence more important than attack? When you stand firm in your faith, whose work are you doing? When you attack a sister or brother, whose work are you doing?

When a lot of people talk about 'spiritual warfare' they mean loud praise and worship, stamping around in prayer, praying against the enemy, 'prayer walking' an area or 'tearing down enemy strongholds' in prayer. Whilst these things may be important, they are not the whole story. Jesus attacked

the enemy kingdom by feeding the hungry, healing the sick and bringing people back to God. We stand against the enemy kingdom with love, forgiveness and unity.

- ✠ In what ways have you felt that you or your family have been attacked in the past, either recently or further back in time?
- ✠ How did you respond? How did you take your stand?
- ✠ Have you ever found yourself lashing out at other Christians in times of stress or pressure?
- ✠ In Romans 1:22-31 Paul says that strife, malice, gossip and 'backstabbing' (NLT) belong in the same list as sexual immorality, homosexuality and idolatry. In Galatians 5 he says that dissension in the body, discord and factions in the church are 'acts of the flesh' which go alongside sexual immorality, debauchery, witchcraft, drunkenness and orgies. How serious is disunity and discord in the church?
- ✠ Do you believe that gossip and discord are as serious as sexual immorality? If not, why do you think Paul might have listed them together?
- ✠ Someone once said that Satan doesn't need to attack the church, because he has got us to do it for him! If unity is part of our spiritual warfare, then what steps could we take today or this week to win a battle? Is there something which you personally need to do?

6. The Battle belongs to the Lord

I am ashamed to say that when I was about 8 or 9 years old, I got into a fight at school. I can't even remember what it was all about, but I do remember another boy named Grazio Abello telling me that he would be waiting behind the main hall for me at the end of the school day. Throughout the day I had other children coming up to me to ask me if I was really going to fight him, and saying that they would be there to see me get a beating – Grazio Abello was huge! By 3.30pm I was shaking with fear, but I also knew I couldn't just walk away. Pride, fear of what my friends would say, an incipient macho-ness all combined to mean that I couldn't see a way out of the fight. Slowly I made my way to the appointed place to face my enemy.

Imagine my surprise when I got there to find the deputy headmaster next to Grazio. It turned out that all the gossip and whispering about the impending fight had made its way to the staff room during the day, and he was there to break it up. We were both marched back into the school to be given a good telling off and made to shake hands. By the next morning the fight was all but forgotten and we were both able to get on with school-life with our honour intact. I had been saved from the fight by Mr Griffin, the deputy headmaster!

Sometimes we find ourselves fighting in battles which we don't need to be in, and sometimes they are fights which have already been dealt with by someone more powerful.

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-47 and 2 Chronicles 20:1-4 and 13-22

- ✠ In the first reading the boy David finds himself in a fight he cannot possibly win by himself. In the second reading it is the whole nation

of Israel that is in trouble. Have you ever been in a situation which you knew you couldn't handle by yourself and needed help?

- ✘ In both readings we see that 'the battle belongs to the Lord.' How quickly do you turn to God for help in times of trouble rather than trying to help yourself or asking for help from other people? What is your natural tendency in difficult situations?
- ✘ In the 2 Chronicles reading we see in verse 18 that the king, along with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, fall to the ground in worship before the Lord. They are praising and thanking God for victory... the night **before** the victory has been won! How could they praise in such a difficult situation?
- ✘ In the story of David and Goliath, David makes a boast in verse 46 **before** the battle begins. What is the boast? How can David be so certain and so accurate in his prediction?
- ✘ In 2 Chronicles 20:20 Jehoshaphat has some specific instructions for the people. What are they? How might we phrase this to one another today in difficult situations?
- ✘ Both these stories have people who have a certainty and an assurance in what they have not yet seen. They are able to worship and boast because they have a confidence in what they hope for, even though it has not yet happened. This confidence and certainty has a name in the New Testament – what is it, and do you know which scripture we get this definition from?

Read Matthew 27:45-53 and John 28-30

At the centre of the Christian faith stands the cross. We believe that Satan's power has already been broken and final victory is assured because of what Jesus did at Calvary. In study 2 I used the illustration of the Second World War: After D-Day the Allies were certain of victory. The combined industrial and military might of the USA and the British Empire was so great that once they had successfully gained a foothold in Europe on the Normandy beaches, nothing would be able to stop them. There was still a year's worth of terrible fighting to go through, which included some setbacks, but we now know, looking back, that victory on VE day was a certainty. Jesus is the

divine invader, come to liberate the world and take back from Satan what he has illegitimately stolen. At the cross, ultimate victory was assured, but we still live between the ages when there is fighting to be done. We stand between the divine D-Day and VE Day, but we are confident of what we do not see yet and certain of what we hope for in Jesus!

- ✘ What does the torn curtain in Matthew 27:51 represent? What part of the Fall was being undone by the tearing of the curtain?
- ✘ What does the dead rising to life in Matthew 27:52 represent? What part of the Fall was being undone by these resuscitations?
- ✘ Philippians 2:8 Paul tells us that Jesus was 'obedient to death, even death on a cross.' What part of the Fall was being undone by Jesus' obedience?
- ✘ When looking forward to the cross, Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53:5 that "(Jesus) was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his stripes we are healed." What parts of the Fall was undone by the nails? What part by 'his stripes'?
- ✘ In John 19:30 Jesus says, "It is finished?" Verse 28 had already told us that 'all was completed' and 'scripture would be fulfilled (or completed)' What was being finished and completed at the cross?
- ✘ When something is finished, what is there left to be done?
- ✘ If your salvation was finished and completed at the cross, what is there left for you to do?
- ✘ If, at the cross Satan's work was undone, Eden restored, the effects of the Fall dissipated, then what should our response be, even if we do not yet see the fullness of Christ's victory on earth yet?
- ✘ How are you going to do that this week?

7. The Last Chapter

There are two things which a preacher does which you should completely ignore. The first is when they take their watch off and place it on the pulpit or lectern. You need to know that it means absolutely nothing, and is not going to shorten the length of time they preach by a single minute. The other thing you should always ignore is when they say, “and finally.” That doesn’t mean anything either. In the Bible Paul uses exactly that meaningless phrase: In Philippians 3:1 he says, “And finally my brothers...” before proceeding to go on for another 2 full chapters. There is as much AFTER 3:1 in Philippians as there was before it.

However, we have two places in the New Testament where we know with certainty that something is finished. We saw the first one last study in John 20 when Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” When Jesus declared that the work of salvation was finished, he meant just that. The other place is in Revelation 22 when Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Jesus is God’s last word on spiritual warfare. In the last book of the New Testament we see how the war with Satan will finally end.

Read: Revelation 1:1-3 and Revelation 22:16-21

- ✘ According to Revelation, why did God give us this book? What is its purpose?
- ✘ According to verse 22:18-19 what is left to be added to God’s revelation to the church? What is unreliable and still to be taken away?
- ✘ The Revelation of John is addressed specifically to ‘the seven churches in the province of Asia.’ However, as we know Revelation

is a highly symbolic book and '7' represents perfection or completion. If the addressing of the letter to the 7 churches is symbolic, what might it represent?

Revelation is what is called 'apocalyptic literature.' The object of this literature in general was to solve the difficulties connected with the righteousness of God and the suffering condition of His righteous servants on earth. It answers the question, "Why does a good God let his people suffer?" Revelation was written to a persecuted church to talk about their current struggles, and uses symbolic language to talk about Rome and the evil Emperor without naming them directly. However, it is also prophetic in nature, and has meaning for us today in our situation.

- ✠ Remember that something can be true (i.e. "I am consumed by a burning passion") without being literal (I am not actually being physically consumed by real flames). All of Revelation is true, but how much of it should we take literally?
- ✠ Are there some parts of Revelation which are more figurative? How can we give meaning to these passages? How are we to understand difficult imagery in our modern setting? For example, should we try to allocate the image of 'the great prostitute' or 'the two witnesses' to real people, or is it all symbolic? How are we to read such a difficult book?
- ✠ From your shared knowledge as a group of the Book of Revelation, what are the main themes and emphasis? Even if we take it completely figuratively and symbolically, what is the overarching story and theme? This is called the 'metanarrative' or story which holds it all together.
- ✠ Again, from your knowledge of Revelation, what is the final fate of Satan?
- ✠ What is the end of the story for Jesus?

Read Revelation 21:1-7 and Revelation 22:1-6

What is the end of the story for the church and the world?

- ✠ In the last study we asked the question, “What part of the fall was being undone by the cross.” From Revelation 21, what part of the fall is being reversed and undone? Remember the list of consequences of the fall in study 3? Which of these consequences are being addressed by 21:1-7?
- ✠ The story of God’s dealing with the world begins in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, and is set in a garden with 2 trees at the centre – one of which is the tree of life. This story ends in chapter 22 in a city with the tree of life at its centre. To the ancient mind, what do you think is the significance of a story which begins with the creation of a garden and ends with the re-creation of a city? If God is putting right everything which has gone wrong in the world, why doesn’t the story end in another garden?
- ✠ We are told in Revelation 22:1-6 that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. What part of the Fall is being addressed here? What about in verse 3 where it says, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face...”?
- ✠ The story of everything told in the Bible (which begins with creation and finishes with the end of time and the passing away of old world) is completed with the absolute victory of Christ over Satan: he is thrown into an eternal pit of flame and the final elements of his kingdom are undone. We know the end of the story before it even happens. How does this affect the way we get involved in spiritual warfare today? How should this knowledge affect our fight today?
- ✠ The very last words of Jesus in the Bible occurs in the penultimate verse when Jesus says, “I am coming soon.” What does Jesus’ return mean to you? How do you live your life differently in the knowledge that Jesus is coming soon and might even appear today?

8. ...In the meantime.

In the introduction to the last chapter (which you will recall was called, “The Last Chapter”) I told you never to believe a preacher when they said, “And finally.” After ‘the last chapter’ we now have one more study to complete.

Just before the Battle of Waterloo started in June of 1815, Wellington was with a group of his staff officers and senior commanders surveying the battlefield. Across a shallow valley was the French Army drawn up in battle order. Suddenly, there was a great deal of cheering and shouting from the French troops, and as the British focused their telescopes on them, they saw Napoleon Bonaparte riding his white charger at high speed along the front of the French lines – it was often Napoleon’s habit to show himself to his troops in this way before a major battle to encourage them. One of the British officers, an artillery officer named Mercer, turned to Wellington and asked for permission to open fire on Napoleon with his cannon. Wellington was horrified, and forbade it strongly. “What has the world come to when General officers take it upon themselves to try and kill each other?” He asked. “War is not personal!”

I have some bad news. In the cosmic war between the Kingdom of God and Satan, the battle is very personal. Satan hates you as an individual and your relationship with God; he hates your salvation and your worship; he is jealous that you, a mere human has an eternal future whilst he, the ‘angel of light’ and ‘the son of the morning’, has been cast down and fallen from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14).

In Study 1 we saw that there is a war going on that we may not be aware of. In Study 2 we looked at how this war is a conflict between the Kingdoms of God and the enemy. Studies 3 and 4 showed us the tools that Satan uses in his attempts to undermine and destroy God’s creation, and the methods that Jesus uses to counterattack the enemy. Study 5 was all about our personal role in the heavenly conflict and how we can unwittingly be drawn into the

enemies plans, whilst studies 6 and 7 were reminders about God's power and his ultimate victory at the 'Parousia' or second coming. This final study in this series look at our personal battle with the world, the flesh and the devil and how we take our stand against his works.

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:4-10 again. We have looked at these texts several times over the last few weeks, but they are worth looking at one more time!

- ✘ Often, when we are speaking or writing today we put the important stuff at the beginning of what we are saying to grab people's attention. In the ancient world the tradition was to place it at the climax towards the end. The Great Commission was the very last thing Jesus had to say to the disciples because it was so important. Revelation has been placed at the end of the New Testament as a climax to the story of salvation. Over the last few sessions we have looked several times at 3 places in the Epistles which talk about spiritual warfare: Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:4-10. In two of these letters the section on our spiritual battle is the very last thing the writer talks about, and in James it is the penultimate thing. Paul, Peter and James all chose to leave their teaching on spiritual warfare right to the very end of their letters. Why?
- ✘ The late Keith Green penned some sobering words concerning Satan. The song "No One Believes in Me Anymore" is a narrative from the viewpoint of Satan where he describes how easily he is gaining power because no one believes in him anymore. Even in Christian circles today there are many who doubt the existence of the devil. Do you believe he exists? If so, why? If not, then why not?
- ✘ Read Genesis 1:26. Satan's real enemy is God. How does this verse explain why he hates you too?
- ✘ We have examined the tools that the enemy uses in his attack on God's rule and reign in the Kingdom of Heaven. What weapons does he use against you personally as an individual? How can he stop you from being effective as a saint in God's Kingdom?

Remember, God made you for **fruitfulness**. (Genesis 1:28, Matthew 28:19, John 15:2, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 5:8-9, Philippians 1:10-11, Colossians 1:6-10, James 3:17 to name but a few examples from scripture.)

He also made you for **worship** both in this world, and in the one to come. (Romans 12:1, Ephesians 1:11-12, Colossians 1:16, 1 Peter 2:9, Isaiah 43:6-7, 43:20-21.)

Thirdly, God made you to **serve** him and the purposes of the Kingdom on earth. (Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 3:23, Matthew 25:35-36, John 17:18)

Finally, God made you to spend **eternity** with him. (You can find your own scriptures for this!)

To attack God and you, Satan will try to stop these four things happening. We can sum up the core of Satan's tactics against you as an individual by looking at his seven favourite weapons in scripture. They are: Deception, Distraction, Delay, Disappointment, Doubt, Depression and Division.

Deception: Read Genesis 3:1, Matthew 4:3 and 6, John 8:44

- ✘ What do these verses tell us about the nature of the devil?
- ✘ How does he try to deceive us?
- ✘ What are the main lies of Satan in the church and the world today?

Distractions: Read Matthew 5:19-33, Mark 4:19

- ✘ List the distractions which Jesus gives us in these passages.
- ✘ Looking at Matthew 5:23, what distractions are there that come through our eyes in the modern world? How does sexual sin fit into this?
- ✘ From 5:24, how can we be distracted by wealth
- ✘ How do we become diverted from our Godly purposes by worries?

Delays: Read Psalm 13:1-2, Daniel 10:11-13, John 11:4-6, 2 Peter 3:9

- ✘ Daniel had been praying, mourning and fasting for three weeks

before he received a message from God. Potentially this could have led him to doubt and worry. What are some of the reasons that God is sometimes slower in answering our prayers than we would like?

- ✘ How can the devil use this to undermine our purposes and God's plan for our life?

Disappointments: Read Proverbs 13:12, Romans 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

- ✘ Like delays, disappointments with God, with his church and with one another can divert us from God's purposes for our lives. What sort of disappointment can the devil use in our church to stop us from serving God?
- ✘ Have disappointments in other Christians, the church leadership or God ever caused you to evade fellowship, not worship or go to church, or avoid prayer and scripture?

Doubt: Read Matthew 14:28-31, James 1:5-7, Jude 1:22

- ✘ In Matthew 14 Peter achieves a miraculous thing when he has faith, but loses it when he begins to doubt. What caused doubt to set in?
- ✘ In our lives, what can cause doubt to set in?
- ✘ How does doubt prevent us from fulfilling God's purposes?
- ✘ Why does Jude urge mercy for doubters?

Depression: Read 1 Kings 19:3-10

- ✘ In this story about Elijah we see the prophet at the point where he feels he can go on no more. He stops his 'work', isolates himself, stops looking after himself, takes to his bed, and wants to die. If you suffer depression or know someone who does, you will recognise these symptoms. What were the circumstances which led to this situation for Elijah?
- ✘ How does the enemy capitalise on Elijah's exhaustion and disappointment?

- ✘ In verse 10 and again in verse 14 Elijah says that he is the ‘only one left’ who is faithful to God. However, from verse 15 onwards God names 3 individuals who will help Elijah, and then in verse 18 speaks of 7,000 others who are on the Lord’s side. How can depression skew out interpretation of the truth? How can the enemy use it to disrupt the work of the Kingdom?

Depression is a huge problem in the modern world and it is growing. It is the No.1 psychological disorder in the western world. It is growing in all age groups, in virtually every community, and the growth is seen most in the young, especially teens. At the rate of increase, it will be the 2nd most disabling condition in the world by 2020, behind heart disease. Up to 20% of people experience symptoms of depression. 10 times more people suffer from major depression now than in 1945!

- ✘ What can we do as individuals or as a church to better support those with depression? How is this a kingdom activity? What gain does the enemy get from depression?

Division: Read Psalm 133:1, Ephesians 4:2-7

- ✘ We have already looked at how the enemy loves division in the church in previous studies, so we won’t spend much time on it. But, what are the major blessings of unity?
- ✘ In what ways does Satan try to divide the church or brothers and sisters from each other? What sort of activity or events does the enemy target to cause division?
- ✘ How do we counter these attacks?
- ✘ In Ephesians 4:7 Paul uses the word, ‘But...’ Why does he remind the church that we are all different with different levels given to us by Christ?

And finally! Thinking about Ephesians 6:10-20

- ✘ List each of the pieces of armour and weapons, and say what they represent.

- ✠ How do we use each of these pieces of spiritual armour to counter the 2 weapons of the enemy?
- ✠ How do we actually 'put on the armour of God'?
- ✠ Finish the session and these studies by praying for one another. Perhaps you can lay hands on one another specifically for each piece of armour to be put in place (i.e. lay hands on the head for the helmet, the feet for the Gospel shoes etc.)

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