

SPIRITUAL WARFARE – FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

What many Christians may not know is that we are all in a fierce battle with evil forces which are “hell-bent” on derailing our faith and destroying our life. Jesus knew this all too well. He fought with Satan first hand. But, the point is that Jesus beat the devil, and those who follow Jesus can too. In fact, it is part of our purpose to oppose evil in this life. The issue is ‘how’. How do we fight an enemy we cannot see, nor can know him. Well, when it comes to strategy, the devil is pretty transparent. He uses the same old stuff. He does this because the devil cannot create anything new. This course I designed to teach how the devil operates and what weapons of warfare our God has given us to fight him. It is not a comprehensive study, as each child of God should make study of how to defeat their enemy a priority on their own.

Part One: Detecting the Deceiver

Group Focus

What are some examples of the plainly visible evil we all tend to concentrate ourselves on?

Why do we tend to do this?

What visible enemies have you struggled with in the past?

Read 2nd Corinthians 11:1-15

1. In this passage how does Paul compare himself and contrast himself with the “false” apostles in Corinth?
2. How are the dangers that the Corinthian Christians faced similar to those Eve faced when she first met the serpent?
3. Why is it more effective for deceivers to distort the gospel than to deny it altogether, or to preach a different ‘Jesus’ rather than no Jesus at all?
4. False apostles had infiltrated the Corinthian church. In what ways did these deceivers seem to be far superior to Paul?
5. How can a good Bible knowledge protect you from deceiving speakers and leaders?
6. In contrast to the false apostles, Paul did not charge for his ministry. Why do you believe the Corinthians saw this as a weakness rather than a strength?
7. How can we all discern between preachers who merely preach for money or gain and those who have only God blessed motives?
8. Why do you think Satan disguises himself as an angel of light rather than a demon of darkness?
9. Why do Satan’s servants find it effective to masquerade as ‘ministers of righteousness’?

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10. What are some of the pious (or religious) masks that Satan's servants use to deceive people today?
11. Throughout the history of the Christian following, the 'army of God' has been guilty of shooting its own soldiers. How can we keep from falsely accusing true servants of righteousness?
12. What kind of actions might reveal that a minister of "righteousness" is really working for our enemy?

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ MATTHEW 4:1-11 "FACING TEMPTATION"

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Part Two: Facing Temptation

Group Focus

Explain why you believe it is true that everyone can be bought with a price.

In a moment of anger or frustration when have you done or said something you have regretted?

Read Matthew 4:1-11

1. What clues do you see in these verses as to what Jesus may have been thinking and feeling?
2. Why do you think the Spirit lead Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan?
3. If there is nothing wrong with bread or with being hungry, then what was the temptation?
4. When we fail to trust in God, how are we tempted to meet real legitimate needs in the wrong way?
5. In the second temptation, was Satan really misquoting Scripture as many people claim? Explain.
6. Jesus responds in this case with Deuteronomy 6:16 (read this). How does testing God differ from tempting God?
7. What is wrong with demanding that God show His care, providence or power 'right now'?
8. Lastly, the tempter offers Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world. If Jesus would eventually receive all of these anyway, what was the temptation?
9. Why are some shortcuts to what God has for us really spiritual short-circuits?
10. How do these short cuts cause us to bow to Satan even if that is not our intention?
11. How can we make trust, obedience and worship, the weapons Jesus used against the tempter, our weapons of warfare?

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ GENESIS 3:1-6 "THE SERPENT'S STRATEGY"

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Part Three: The Serpent's Strategy

Group Focus

In some restaurants the waitress or waiter will bring a table with all kinds of desserts after you have finished with your meal. Why is this a more effective way to get you to buy dessert than to simply give you a dessert menu? What are some temptations you have faced that appeared harmless or attractive on the surface?

Read Genesis 3:1 – 6

1. Looking at this passage of Scripture, what different thoughts and emotions do you believe Eve may have had throughout this temptation?
2. In verse 1 the serpent asks Eve, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" How does Satan's version compare with what God really said (see 2:16-17)?
3. From the way he worded this question, what do you think Satan hoped to accomplish?
4. Why do you think Satan appears to Eve in the form of a serpent (vs. 1) instead of showing himself openly?
5. How does Eve's response reveal that Satan's venom is beginning to affect her thinking about God (vs. 2-3)?
6. How can doubting God's generosity make us targets for temptation and sin?
7. Satan's next tactic is to boldly declare, "You will not surely die!" Why do you think he lies to Eve about the consequences of sin?
8. Why is it tempting to believe that sin has no consequences? What are some examples?
9. In verse 5 Satan goes one step further by saying Eve would be like God if she ate of the tree. Read this verse and explain what it implies about both God and sin.
10. What evidence do you see today that some people believe God is a "Cosmic Killjoy" and that sin is really good for you?
11. In verse 6 Satan breaks off his offensive with Eve. How is this tactic similar to the one the waiter uses in the restaurant with the dessert table?
12. Martin Luther once said, "You can't keep the birds from circling overhead, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." Why is it dangerous to keep toying with temptation or to fantasize about it?
13. What can you do instead of toying or fantasizing?

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ EPHESIANS 6:10-20 "THE ARMOR OF GOD"

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Part Four: The Armor of God

Group Focus

What kind of protective “armor” have you worn when playing sports or activities? Why? Describe a time when you felt surrounded by God’s Holy protection.

Read Ephesians 6:10-20

1. As you read this passage, what particular battlefield comes into your mind?
2. Why must we rely on God’s power if we are to be victorious against our spiritual enemies?
3. Throughout Paul’s life he was oppressed, whipped, beaten, stoned and imprisoned by various people and groups. Why does he claim that our struggle is not “against flesh and blood”?
4. Paul identifies our true enemy as the devil (verse 11) and the demonic rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces of this dark age in which we live. What are some of the evidences you see of these hostile and deadly forces in your life or the life of another Christian you know?
5. Why do you think Paul states three times that we must stand our ground, then do everything to stand and stand firm?
6. Why are both the truth and righteousness essential elements of our “armor”?
7. How can the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ) message that you now have peace with God (verse 15) give you strength to stand against these spiritual forces?
8. Faith (verse 16) refers to both what we believe and who we believe in. How can our faith act like a shield against all of the evil one’s arrows?
9. What arrows has the devil aimed at you recently?
10. In what ways do you need to exercise your faith in God’s protection and promises?
11. The “Sword of the Spirit” (verse 17) is our only offensive weapon. Why do we need both the Spirit of God and the Word of God to defeat the devil?
12. Although prayer (verses 18-20) isn’t listed as one of the pieces of our armor, how is it a vital component of your spiritual warfare?

Reflection: Take the time this week to list those you know are under spiritual attack. Spend time each day praying for them and asking God to give them His grace and strength. Come against the attacks verbally in Jesus’ Name. Claim victory for each of these people.

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ JAMES 4:1-10 “THE WAR WITHIN”

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Part Five: The War Within

Group Focus

Why do you suppose Christians spend so much of their time arguing amongst themselves?
What are some of the things that cause fights and quarrels in your family or at work?

Read James 4:1-10

1. What are some of the words in this passage of Scripture that reflect tension and conflict?
2. If James asked most people ‘What causes fights among you?’, they respond, ‘It’s the other person’s fault!’. How do you see James challenging that answer?
3. The meaning of verse 2 is seen most clearly in this translation: “You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you quarrel and fight”. Why would frustrated desires lead a person to be verbally or even physically violent?
4. James goes on to say, “You do not have because you do not ask God.” (verse 2). When we are frustrated because we can’t have what we want, why is it better to pray than to fight?
5. Sometimes even God won’t give us what we want (verse 3). Why is it important to examine our motives when we pray? How can we do this?
6. When we pray with a worldly motive, in what sense are we asking God to help us commit spiritual adultery (verses 4 and 5)?
7. If you fight and argue a lot, or if you desire the wrong things for the wrong reasons, then James says you need God’s Grace (verse 6). What steps do we need to take to receive that grace?
8. Why do you think God requires such a radical response?
9. Even though James has stressed that our own evil desires and motives are the true source of conflict, he says in verse 7, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Why do you think the devil loves to see us fight and quarrel?
10. When we resist the devil in the ways that James suggests (verses 6 – 10), why will he flee from us?
11. Think of someone with whom you regularly fight and fuss with. How can James’ insight and commands help you live in peace with that person?

Reflection: Take time this week to examine your own heart. What impure motive might be hindering your prayers? How might those motives reveal an infatuation with a sinful desire? Come nearer to God following the steps James suggests in this passage we have studied.

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ MARK 5:1 – 20 “DEFEATING THE DESTROYER”

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Part Six: Defeating the Destroyer

Group Focus

With the advent of modern science and psychology, why do you think the idea of demon possession evolved into a myth instead of a reality? Why do you think demon possession, which seemed so prevalent in Jesus' day, seems so rare in western society?

Read Mark 5:1-20 In this passage we are introduced to a horrible and tragic scene where Jesus confronts a demon-possessed man whose life has become a living nightmare.

1. What do we learn about the dark and destructive life of the man Jesus meets?
2. What do the man's experiences teach us about the devil's desires for each one of us?
3. Why do you think the man speaks and acts as he does when he sees Jesus from a distance?
4. A Roman legion consists of about 6,000 soldiers. How does this help us to understand the persuasive nature of Satan' control over this man?
5. Although we know nothing about the man's life prior to his demon possession, what steps might lead an ordinary person to become increasingly controlled by evil?
6. The story of the pigs is one of the strangest in all of Scripture. Why do you think both Jesus and the demons acted as they did?
7. Describe the response of the people from the town when they see both the man and Jesus?
8. Why do they respond in fear rather than with faith?
9. Often in Mark's Gospel you will see Jesus telling the people to follow Him. This man is eager to follow Jesus, but Jesus sends him home instead. Why?
10. Have you ever experienced observing someone who is demon-possessed? Was the demon cast out?
11. How does this story in Mark help us to relate to the spirit world that exists around us?

Reflection: Take time this week to thank God for delivering you from evil and showing mercy to you. Pray for holy boldness and for opportunities to talk to family members about the love of God.

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ REVELATION 12:7-12 "OVERCOMING THE ACCUSER"

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Part Seven: Overcoming the Accuser

Group Focus

Think of a time when someone chased you with the intent to do you harm, maybe when you were a child. How did you feel, and what did you do to get away? Why do you think accusation is such a powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal?

Read Revelation 12:7-12

1. Describe everything you can about the war that is fought in verses 7 through 9.
2. Notice the different titles used for Satan in verse 9. What can you learn about him and his tactics against you from each of these descriptions?
3. Verse 10 begins with a triumphant declaration of Satan's defeat. What words or phrases in verse 10 emphasize God's strength in contrast to Satan's?
4. On the one hand, the devil is described as the accuser of our brothers who accuses them before God day and night (v. 10). But in the next breath he is described as the one who has been hurled down from heaven. How does the Blood of the Lamb overcome all of the devil's accusations against us? (v. 11)
5. When you have felt assaulted by guilt or shame, how has it helped to realize that Christ's blood was shed for you?
6. A second key to overcoming Satan is our testimony (v. 11). How can sharing our faith with others even in the face of opposition enable us to overcome the devil?
7. Verse 11 implies that if we love our lives too much, then we will be hesitant to testify about Christ in the face of opposition or threats. Why would this be true?
8. When Christians are martyred for their faith, it appears to the world that they have been defeated rather than victorious. The same was true of the death of Jesus. Yet, how can their apparent defeat be seen as an ultimate victory?
9. Verse 12 concludes by saying that the devil is filled with fury because he knows his time is short. Why should this statement keep us from being complacent about our struggle with Satan?
10. How can John's vision of the war in heaven encourage you in the midst of the spiritual battles you face?

Reflection: Thank God for the Blood of the Lamb that overcomes all of the devil's accusations! Pray for the grace to be faithful in testifying about the Gospel, even in the face of opposition.

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ JOB CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 "SURVIVING SATAN'S ATTACKS"

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Part Eight: Surviving Satan's Attacks

Group Focus

On the morning of April 18th, 1906 San Francisco was shaken by a violent earthquake that virtually destroyed the city. The city dwellers awoke to a world falling apart around them. In what ways are personal sufferings or tragedies like earthquakes? What are some of the thoughts and feelings you had when a personal tragedy made it seem the world was falling down around you?

Read Job 1 and 2

1. In a Greek tragedy (a form of play) the greatness of the main character emphasizes the heights from which he falls. In a similar way, how do the verses 1 through 5 set the stage for the tragedy that follows?
2. At the beginning of this story, why do you think we are allowed to overhear the conversation between God and Satan (a conversation that was never heard by Job or by his friends)?
3. The name "Satan" means accuser. What is the essence of Satan's accusation against Job and how does this accusation lead to Job's disaster?
4. Try to put yourself in Job's place. How might you have felt as wave after wave of disaster struck?
5. Have you ever wanted to bang on the gates of heaven and demand an explanation for the pain and suffering you are experiencing? Why is the desire for reason so important to us?
6. What is astounding about Job's response to his dilemma (vss. 20 through 22)?
7. Why do you think he is still able to worship and praise the Lord?
8. Read Job chapter 2. The scene in heaven repeats itself with a new twist. Why is Satan still unsatisfied with Job's character?
9. How would Job's new affliction intensify the pain and hopelessness he already felt? (See 7:5, 13 and 14, 30:17 and 30)
10. Those who curse God (2:9) were to be stoned according to the law (Leviticus 24:10-16). How does Job respond to his wife's solution to his suffering?
11. Based on this passage, how does Satan use suffering and tragedy to tempt us to sin?
12. How can we follow Job's example when suffering strikes?

Reflection: Bring to the Lord any pain you are currently experiencing and ask Him for strength to endure that pain without giving in to Satan's temptations.

FOR NEXT WEEK, PLEASE READ 2ND THESSALONIANS 2:1-17 "STANDING FIRM"

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Part Nine: Standing Firm

Group Focus

Why do you think Christians are inclined to believe that someone in their generation is the one and only Antichrist? Do you think it is wise to speculate about the identity of this person? Why or why not?

Read 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-17

1. According to this portion of Scripture, what false information caused the Thessalonians to be unsettled or alarmed?
2. Even today some groups claim Jesus Christ has already come. How does Paul know for sure that Jesus has not come yet?
3. Paul says that before the Lord returns the “man of lawlessness” will be revealed. In what ways will this man be a counterfeit Christ?
4. Paul says, “The secret of lawlessness is already at work”. This is the kind of power that will reach its climax with the antichrist. In what ways do you see the power of lawlessness at work in the world around you?
5. What are some of the world leaders, either present or in the past, seem to have been driven by the secret power of lawlessness?
6. What outward and inward reasons will cause people to be deceived by this “lawless one”?
7. According to verses 10 through 12, how do our values and lifestyle influence our ability to perceive spiritual truth?
8. According to this passage of Scripture, what is the ultimate fate of the man of lawlessness and those who follow the power of lawlessness?
9. What is it that God has already done, and what does Paul ask Him to do to make our lives different both now and in the future?
10. What are some things we all can do to cooperate in this process of change?
11. Think of a spiritual conflict that you are facing or have faced in the past. How can you “stand firm” and hold to Biblical truth in this situation?

Reflection: Recite Paul’s prayer aloud this week. Make a list of good deeds you could do for your family, your neighbors and your work acquaintances and church family this week. Ask God to give you strength and wisdom in these tasks.

FOR NEXT WEEK WE WILL REVIEW ALL NINE SECTIONS OF THE CLASS. GO OVER YOUR NOTES FROM PAST SESSIONS AND BE PREPARED TO GIVE YOUR ASSESSMENT AS TO THE USEFULNESS OF THIS CLASS AND HOW YOU ARE PREPARED TO USE IT TO BETTER YOUR LIFE AND YOUR WALK WITH CHRIST.

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Review

- We learned that things are not always what they seem to be. The Bible tells us to be cautious. What are some of the plain and visible evil in the world today?
- Why does Satan disguise himself as an angel of light rather than a demon of darkness?
- We learned that our response to Satan can set the stage for his attempt to tempt us. When we fail to trust in God, how are we tempted to meet legitimate needs in the wrong way?
- How can we make trust, obedience and worship the weapons Jesus used against the tempter our weapons of warfare?
- We learned that it is and has always been Satan's strategy to make us doubt God. How can doubting God's generosity and providence make us targets for temptation and sin?
- Why is it dangerous to keep toying with temptation or to fantasize about it?
- The Spiritual warfare we must wage is not like other battles we have fought. The armor must be God's armor. Why are truth and righteousness essential elements of our armor?
- Although prayer isn't listed in the Book of Ephesians as a part of the Armor of God, how is it a vital component of your spiritual warfare?
- Sometimes even God won't give us what we want. Why is it important to examine our motives when we pray?
- Think of someone with whom you regularly fight and fuss with. How can the commands of Jesus help you live in peace with that person?
- We learned that demon possession is possible today and exists to some degree in those around us. Why do you think people tend to ignore the possibility that evil influence exists?
- Have you ever experienced someone possessed with a Demon? Was the person cast out?
- In Revelation chapter 12 we learned that our enemy goes by many titles. Which of his names most closely relates how you see him?
- When you have felt assaulted by guilt or shame, how has it helped that Christ's Blood was shed for you?
- Job literally lost everything in one fell swoop. Yet he did not curse God or blame Him. Why do you think he was still able to worship God?
- How does Satan use pain, suffering and tragedy to tempt us to sin?
- How will we know the identity of the Antichrist? Are there antichrists in the world today?
- How has this study helped you in your efforts against the powers of darkness?