

Dealing With Darkness:

Sunday message CRBC July 27, 2014

Introduction:

My wife Kristy and I are going on our 30th year of ministry among First Nations people here on Vancouver Island. I received my missions training at Moody Bible School in Chicago. That is where I started learning about culture and world view.

Seated deep in the layers of our culture and beliefs, is our world view. If you've been here over the last number of years, you will from time to time have heard mention of the role that world view plays in our spiritual lives. This deeply seated set of beliefs determines how we make sense of the world around us. When we read the Bible, we process what we are reading through our world view, sometimes what we read does not make sense through how we understand the world. The desire then is to let what is written in scripture impact our understanding to change it if necessary.

So the ongoing question that we need to ask ourselves is, 'Does Scripture reinforce my world view or challenge it?' One of the problems incorporated into talking about beliefs and world view, is that it can generate feelings of insecurity, or of being attacked or criticized personally. I certainly do not want that to be the case, but I do want to affirm to you that there are strengths and weaknesses with our system of beliefs. I am not here to hate on my culture. But we do need to allow God's word to speak into our lives, which also means our system of beliefs.

If you are from European/ mainstream North American society your world view is heavily influenced by secular humanism. You may say that your Biblical faith flies in the face of secular humanism, and it does, but we still process so much of what we think and do through a secular and humanistic frame of thinking.

Now some of you may seriously disagree with me on this, I understand, and worldview and its implications are an enormous topic. But I hope to bring a little of this to light as we get into our scriptures for today.

So, today we are going to look at **some** of the biblical revelation concerning the forces of wickedness and evil, forces that are in league with Satan, our enemy. This too is an enormous topic, impossible to cover over a short stretch of time. It is also a controversial subject for many obvious reasons, but the reality of the enemy, Satan and his forces is readily reinforced throughout scripture. For those of us here that feel this is only a peripheral subject and seldom mentioned, there are over 100 references to wicked spirits, unclean spirits, the forces of darkness in the New Testament alone. And that count leaves out all of the specific references to Satan himself.

Although there is no clear explanation of the origin of unclean spirits, it is clear that they are linked with the workings of Satan. It is assumed from a number of references that unclean spirits are angels that rebelled at the time that Satan did. Satan is not all-

powerful and can't be everywhere at once, but he does have spirits that help carry out his designs for this world.

They are most often referred to as:

Demons, wicked or unclean spirits and they are evil, destructive, and cruel by nature. Their plans are in direct opposition to God's plans.

Scripture doesn't answer all the questions we would like answered regarding wicked forces, but it collectively tells much more about them than most of us realize.

So here is the first scripture for today, and honestly I find this passage challenging and disturbing no matter how many times I read it.

1st Scripture – Ephesians 6: 10-12

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

You notice Paul said 'we wrestle' not 'I wrestle'. He is telling the Ephesians that a believer's struggle is with wicked spiritual forces. These, obviously, are the wicked forces in league with and under the direction of Satan. **Has this reality changed since Paul wrote this to the church in Ephesus?**

So, how does that work, 'wrestling' with wicked spirits? **When was the last time that you were aware of the presence of a wicked spirit during a time of spiritual struggle?** From this passage, it sounds like this is a somewhat regular occurrence.

I think most of us would agree that we are very much aware of our struggle with our flesh and the pull it exerts on us to live our own way, wanting to do the wrong thing, but where is the demonic in that? This is my own self wanting to do wrong, a part of me that I need to deny. I am supposed to walk by the Spirit instead, Paul and James also wrote about this.

But, again, the apostle Paul said 'our struggle', not 'his struggle' **is with these beings.** Ok, so here is the basic problem, most of us don't sense them being there, and so we just assume they're not there. But think about this, if God's Word says that I struggle with demons, yet to my knowledge, there aren't any around, then, there is either something wrong with my perception and understanding or there is something wrong with this passage.

The fact is, New Testament Scripture assumes a layer of spiritual presence and conflict to always be present. We all know that it is very difficult to inter-act with, pay attention to or avoid something that we cannot physically see or grab hold of. Yet, according to Scripture, the spiritual dimension is very real. So what then is the problem here? The problem is with our world view. Our worldview tends to forget, ignore, or even

deny this spiritual reality. From my background, people that talked about spirits were labeled as superstitious. You see, *I don't think we have totally lost the notion that 'superstition = ignorance'.*

The Modernist mindset that most of us have been enormously impacted by challenged the idea of the reality of spirit. And we also find that we have lived in a society that holds to a notion that 'civilization- Western thought – rational intelligence – (materialism), drives out belief in spirits, magic, and sorcery. *The end result is that we, (me included here), have some areas in our understanding that are weak if not blind.*

So, our culture, our set of beliefs and understanding that help us to function and make sense of the world around us also act as filters for what we take in. So when we read the Bible, we run what we read through our set of filters.

Personal experience is also a filter. In the realm of personal experience regarding our enemy, it is possible for a believer from our culture, as far as they are personally and experientially aware, to go through their entire life with nary an encounter with a demon, or wicked spirit. This is because our world view tends to leave out a portion of creation that has to do with spirit. You have God up there, us and creation down here, and nothing in the middle. This middle is namely the realm of angels and demons. In fact in our thinking, we tend to categorize this middle of angels and demons in the realm of supernatural instead of part of the natural created world.

Ok, so lets take a look at a passage that refers to some of the linking of our 'struggle' with ourselves and with spirit.

2nd Scripture:

2 Corinthians 2:10, 11

¹⁰ *Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

And I have to honestly say, 'wait a minute, I am ignorant of his designs (or schemes). What does my act of forgiveness have to do with the devil?' Again, somehow in the history, culture, and world view of the Evangelical church, we have become blind and ignorant of these facets of Christian living. The reality of our struggle with Satan and his forces spoken of in Scripture has tended to take a back seat in our thinking. The result then is that the biblical teachings regarding awareness, preparation and engagement are missed or determined by us to be irrelevant! But Paul is telling the Corinthians that they need to forgive or the enemy will gain some kind of advantage over them.

In a number of the cultures that I have worked among, encounters with spirits are quite overt and common. These cultures have explanations for why spirit manifestations happen. These cultures also have procedures to follow to attempt to keep spirit encounters, (especially the fearful kind), to a minimum. In my area, although the presence of spirits is recognized, the explanations of what is going on and solutions for how to make encounters stop can stray significantly from what the Bible teaches.

So the question is, if the Bible reveals the prevalence of the enemy, but my senses do not, how has the enemy been working against me, or **what kind of access does the enemy have in regards to me?**

The North American Evangelical Line—

Now I know that Satan and demons have not been totally ignored in our understanding of scripture. But I have observed that many Evangelical believers suffer from Star Trek syndrome, that is, they hold to the notion that there is an invisible ‘force -field’ around them. So anything from the enemy bounces off. Where did that come from?

There are many warnings in scripture regarding the enemy, *we would not be warned about something that we don’t need to be concerned about.*

OK, So let’s look at some of the scripture references that do reveal some of the designs or schemes of Satan and his forces.

Temptation, rationalizing sin:

Matthew 4:1-3 *“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Vss 5,6 “Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he stood Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God throw yourself down; for it is written, He will give His angels charge concerning you; and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”*

Finding a foothold or point of control through unforgiveness:

2 Corinthians 2: 10,11 *“But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”*

Finding a foothold through anger and grudges:

Ephesians 4:26,27 *“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Promoting jealousy and ambition:

James 3:14-16 *“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”*

Controlling through fear and panic:

1 Peter 5:8 *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

This is not just through overt or scary manifestations, but also can be control through deep seated fears. Obviously not all fear is from the enemy, but some of it can be. And in regards to strange or what is now called ‘paranormal’ experiences it has been my observation that in our culture, most people that have this kind of encounter will not talk about it because of fear, fear of the enemy and fear of what other people will think.

Promoting lying:

Acts 5:3,4 *“But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.”*

Hold on, Satan filled his heart? Is that possible? Ananias was a believer. And these other passages, they seem to be indicating something that many do not consider possible, **Does the enemy have some kind of access to our minds?**

Inventing and promoting false teaching to shipwreck believers:

1 Timothy 4:1 *“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”*

Power demonstrations from demons and false teachers to validate false teaching:

Mark 13:22 *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray.”*

Using cunning to divert attention/submission to Christ:

2 Corinthians 11:3 *“But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”*

Impersonating godly people and holy angels to deceive:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteous;...”*

Impersonating the Holy Spirit:

1 John 4:1-3 *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that is coming, and now it is already in the world.”*

A side note here, there is an enormous void in many Christian circles in regards to the serious testing of what people receive as ‘from the Lord’.

Demoralizing accusations:

Revelation 12: 10 *“And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day*

and night,...”

Frequent, condemning thoughts. Thoughts that demoralize and depress. Thoughts that cause an inability to be effective in faith.

This is certainly not a comprehensive listing of what is in Scripture but it does give us some insight into various ways that the enemy is using to fight against God’s people.

I know looking at this and thinking about this can be confusing. And I certainly do not want anyone to be overwhelmed. But think about this, these passages in fact offer us explanations of what in fact is going on around us and with us.

James 4:6,7

6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

I think we have done fairly well in the area of teaching and learning about submission to God, but we know very little about how to resist Satan.

We see from the previous passages, that much of what the enemy is about is influence and if possible, control.

There are many passages concerning what to do to resist the enemy. This again, is an enormous subject, but there are some basic principles to keep in mind, such as submitting and resisting.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, The main area of struggle starts in our thoughts. In other words, the initial battleground is in our minds. That is why having a healthy understanding of scripture is so important.

Satan and his forces are powerful beings, how in the world can a person stand against their power and intelligence?

So here is where we need to step back a bit from all of this and set our vision on our Savior, Christ Jesus. He is Lord, He is Creator, He is our deliverer. He broke the power of the devil and his forces when he died on the cross. Not only this, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father,

Ephesians 1: 18-23

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in

accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And in chapter 2

Ephesians 2: 4-6

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

So in position and authority, it is our right to stand against and speak against our enemy.

Two major components of resisting to keep in mind are:

1. **Prayer**, never underestimate what prayer accomplishes. Pray for discernment, pray for people who are suspected of being under attack. Prayer binds and restricts the activities of our enemy. We can pray for the Lord to reveal to us or to others the source of ‘internal conflict’.

2. **Practice**, *If the Bible is true in stating that we struggle with spirit powers, then you need to find out how and when this happens with yourself.* When you experience temptation, deep anger, panic, deep irrational emotions etc., pray for guidance and then address what may possibly be the source of these thoughts or feelings. In the Ephesians 6 passage, Paul uses the illustration of armor, the shield of faith, the sword of God’s word, speaking the truths of scripture directly against the source of lies and deceit. We also read in scripture, that Jesus spoke verbally to the forces of darkness and to Satan himself, “Be gone!”, “get behind (away from) me”.

You will learn the sources of these conflicts within as the Holy Spirit reveals. Our flesh yearns to rebel, to be independent of God. We can feed our flesh to where it takes control. We make the decision to sin; we are responsible for our sin. The enemy may be there too however, cheering us on the sidelines or actually giving further suggestions as to what we ‘really need’. Revelation of the enemy’s involvement brings a sobering recognition to the fact that ‘we are not alone’. In truth we have present with us and around us the fullness of God, His holy angels, *and* wicked spirits.

Sometimes, when a person has been inundated with deceit from the enemy and there are layers of thinking and influence to unwrap, then counseling may be in order. Sometimes it is hard to sift through it all on our own. I have personally been counseling in this area for close to 30 years and programs like Freedom Sessions are so helpful in helping people work through their past. Many times when I have been counseling, the Lord has helped people become aware that not all of the streams of thoughts flowing through their minds are coming from themselves. Something else is putting them there, and has been for a long time. I get the privilege of seeing the Lord remove that presence.

We need to teach our children about this as well, because they certainly will be and certainly are facing attacks from our enemy. In the post- modern world that our culture has been moving into, we are seeing a tremendous upsurge in media focus on psychic or occult phenomena. I believe it is a reaction to the sterile pure science/physical no God, no spirit vacuum created by modernity.

I know it is a concern that if you talk to children about demons they will live in fear or become afraid, all the more reason to show the rule and authority of Jesus Christ. Do not shelter your children from this. If you want to teach your child about bullying, you don't tell them, 'don't worry it will never happen to you'. No, you teach them what to do if and when it happens.

And this is an area where each one of us can see the power of our Lord Jesus at work. Jesus is actively involved in our lives right now in this very area of defeating the enemy and delivering His people.