

Spiritual Warfare in the Church Today:

Where We Have Come from and Where We are Going.

Introduction

- A. I wish to thank Dr. Mark Bubeck, Dr. Daniel Rumberger and those associated with the International Center for Biblical Counseling -- for the invitation to attend this conference.
- B. The topic, on which I have been asked to speak, is a very broad subject, and a very important one. In my attempt to say a few words about the past, present and future regarding spiritual warfare -- I must be very brief and touch only lightly on a number of subjects which deserve much more attention.
- C. First of all let us turn to the Bible: Luke 9:1,2; 10:1,17-21; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:10-18.

I. The Description of Our Present Condition.

- A. While not a Church Historian I believe it is correct to say that all across our land there are evangelical churches where correct doctrine is held -- and yet where there is very little help -- for the many believers who are under the attack of the enemy.
- B. All across our land there are godly men and women in the ministry -- who have a good education, and are committed; people who struggle to live for God and do His will -- and yet they do not know how to resist and overcome the work of the enemy in their own lives or how to give practical help in this area to those among whom they minister.
 - 1. The number of pastors who are more of an example of spiritual failure than spiritual success, living with serious incompatibility with their spouses, broken homes, divorce immorality, confessions of failure to live the Christian life, confessions of a powerless ministry, leaving the ministry -- all testify to something seriously wrong. They need something more than the bandaid approach of telling these men to talk more with their wife -- and to learn better techniques of ministry.
 - 2. Reference must also be made to the number of missionaries who, after years of training, go to their field with commitment and determination, only to find themselves failing in many areas of their life and ministry, and not knowing why. The rate of one term missionary service is tragically high.
 - 3. We must also include in our thinking that great number of earnest believers, committed and serious believers -- who are determined to live for God and do His will -- people who know how to put off the old man and put on the new, who know the basic doctrines, who pray, read, and study the Bible regularly, who are faithful in church attendance, and yet find themselves confused because they sense an opposition, a continual hindrance, a negative spiritual pressure in their life that not only confuses them but makes spiritual progress almost impossible.
 - 4. While I do not attribute all these difficulties to the enemy -- I believe we must affirm that Christianity works. And where there is Biblical commitment -- and the willingness to struggle with the basic issues of the daily life and ministry -- and there is not some continual and lasting success -- then we had better look around for the enemy.

- C. We must also refer to the number of godly men and women who are leaders in evangelical circles -- I am referring to leaders in churches, mission boards, Christian organizations, Bible Schools, Christian colleges, Seminaries, writers, Bible conference speakers, and many more -- who truly believe all the correct doctrines and who are committed people -- seeking to be honest with God and do His will -- and yet they do not believe that there can be any type of serious inner working of the enemy in a believer's life.
1. Because of such a situation pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers are not adequately trained to resist and oppose the enemy -- and are, therefore, not able to overcome him in their own lives and are powerless to help those to whom they minister.
 2. There are also many sad cases of individuals who went into the ministry with such a lack in their lives, and yet in that ministry learned how to resist the enemy and how to help oppressed people -- only to find themselves put out of their church, or expelled from the mission agency, or expelled from the school where they were teaching -- all because, mind you, they found how to do the work for which they should have been trained originally. **And the very people who did not adequately train them now lead in not only opposing them -- but lead in discipling them or expelling them!**
- D. What has happened to us? We have just read important passages from the Scripture where we are told that a part of the ministry is to resist the enemy and help those who are under his oppression.
1. Is the problem simply a matter of terminology? Are people upset because of the word "possession?" While we must be careful to explain Biblical terms -- it seems to be much more than that.
 2. Is the problem due to how some people have put too much emphasis on the deliverance ministry, have made exaggerated claims for both involvement as well as freedom? Is the resistance we find about us due to a few fanatics? It seems to be much more than that.

II. The Source of Our Present Condition

- A. First of all we must recognize that our fallen nature -- our depravity -- is opposed to Biblical supernaturalism. While it is important to understand that we have been created in the image of God -- and therefore all mankind is religious in that we have an inner awareness of deity -- because we are fallen people we intuitively seek to repress the knowledge of God of which we are somewhat aware of within and see in a confused way -- without. Paul spoke of this in Romans 1 when he said,

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. V18.

A great deal needs to be said about this point but I must go on.

- B. A second obvious reason why supernaturalism is being downplayed today is found in the work of Satan himself. If he can get us to question supernaturalism in some way -- to weaken it in some way -- then to that extent he has gained an advantage over us.

It was in the Garden of Eden that he sarcastically said, "Yea, hath God said?" The human race has largely agreed with him and said, "No, God has not spoken." And, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we go on heaping up evidence for this profound error. Due to this Satanic activity divine revelation in the Biblical sense has been denied, and the Scriptures have become little more than a human discovery -- instead of a divine disclosure.

And, we cannot discount the work of the enemy in our own lives as believers. What can we say about the many American colleges, universities, and seminaries which were started as institutions dedicated to Jesus Christ, and designed to teach the inspired Scriptures, but today make no profession of being Christian. Such schools as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Smith, Dartmouth, and the University of Chicago -- to name only a few who have departed from the faith.

Harold Lindsell, in his book, The New Paganism, has pointed out that very few schools that started as Christian institutions "have maintained their commitment for more than a hundred years." (p. 101)

Closely connected with the downfall of these schools and seminaries once dedicated to supernaturalism -- is the increase of Liberalism in the mainline denominations. The two go somewhat hand-in-hand. Again, it would be helpful and instructive to pursue this area.

How can we account for such a decline? It would seem we have a powerful enemy, who has great resources at his disposal, and who is constantly working against us -- an enemy with whom we -- even as believers appear to eventually agree with in some way -- in his weakening of the Biblical view of supernaturalism.

- C. And now I wish to look at the source of our present condition in a different way. Allow me to state this as a proposition -- a rather startling one -- and then develop it a little. Very briefly: the source of our present condition is due to the fact that we -- as Evangelicals -- have accepted many of the principles of the Enlightenment. I know this sounds like an impossibility -- but I believe I can demonstrate it.

There are two recent publications that has been a great help to me in the preparation of this sermon. I have already mentioned one of them, it is the book by Harold Lindsell, The New Paganism. The second book presents an even more clear picture of the influence of the Enlightenment among us as Evangelicals. It is entitled Christianity with Power by Charles Kraft. I hope each of you will purchase these volumes and read them carefully.

We are living in a flow of history and what has happened in the past cannot but have an effect upon us. With the pressure of our depravity leading us toward a weakening of the concept of supernaturalism, and the pressure of the demonic pushing us in the same direction, -- we are all very vulnerable to historical movements that tend to question and devitalize supernaturalism.

As Evangelicals we do not give in to any of these pressures. However, even though we maintain a strong view of supernaturalism when it comes to a doctrinal position -- in practice -- in our daily life and ministries, we have a tendency to downplay supernaturalism. I will take up this theme a little later in the sermon.

What is my proposition? It is that we as Evangelicals have accepted many of the principles of the Enlightenment.

- D. Let me talk about the Enlightenment.

1. In regard to our subject there are three great movements which we must keep in mind.
 - a. The Renaissance (14th, 15th, 16th Centuries)

A revival of interest in the early Greek and Roman classics -- not only for literature but as a basis of values, meaning in life, and definition as to how to live. It was an attempt to return to the old pagan humanism of Greek and Roman thought. A very powerful movement.

b. The Reformation (Mid 16th to 17th Centuries)

A reaction to the deadness of the church and its non-Biblical practices. Luther (d. 1546) led the way in reforming the Church. There were many influential individuals and groups that were speaking up against the Church and its practices. The outcome was a new emphasis on accepting on the Bible for one's authority, and believing that salvation was only by faith alone, and that the goal of life was only for the glory of God. The men and women involved in the Reformation accepted the Scriptural concept of supernaturalism and attempted to be consistent with it in Biblical interpretation as well as in Church order and daily life.

c. The Enlightenment (18th Century)

The Reformation which started with a good deal of purity, clarity, and honest interpretation of the Bible became weakened into a movement in which the Christian and non-Christian alike had difficulty distinguishing truth from error and history from myth. It is this weakness in the Church, her failure to remain pure, and her neglect of the issues of the day that led to the spawning of the Enlightenment. Peter Gay from Yale, in his excellent book The Enlightenment: an Interpretation (Vintage Books, 1966), stated that Gibbon in his writing of The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire spoke of the Enlightenment as "a bridge thrown across the swamp of the Christian Millennium." (p. 58)

Consider the significance of that statement. Many of the intellectual leaders of the world believed they had to abandon what they held to be the authoritarian dictates of the Church. They looked upon the period of the Reformation as a "millennial swamp."

This attitude was given form by Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) who may be called the philosopher of the Enlightenment. He summarized the movement well. In 1784 he wrote an article on the Enlightenment in which he said, "The Enlightenment was man's coming of age. It was man's emergence from the immaturity which caused him to rely on external authorities as the Bible, the Church, and the state to tell him what to think and do. No generation should be bound by the creeds and customs of bygone ages. To be so bound is an offense against human nature, whose destiny lies in progress." (Quoted by Colin Brown in The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, (Walter Elwell, Ed.) Baker Book House.

Immanuel Kant was a Lutheran. While he affirmed the reality of God and the spiritual world, he taught that divine revelation was an impossibility, and that sin was a meaningless doctrine, and that neither God nor the spiritual world could be known but only grasped by faith -- which he said had no truth or knowledge content. In teaching that faith had no basis in knowledge, and that God and the spiritual world cannot be an object of knowledge -- he opened the door to all forms of Deism, Agnosticism, and became in a very real sense one of the fathers of modern day Liberalism.

Harold Lindsell, in his book, The New Paganism, stated, "Whoever fails to understand what the Enlightenment did cannot understand the role of the church in modern culture. Until the fact of the demise of the church as a primary factor in Western civilization is seen, the need for another reversal will not be perceived and no orderly plan will be put into operation to effect any change." (P. 45)

C. The "world view" that came out of the Enlightenment.

1. We must recognize that all of us have a "world-view." We all have a way of looking at the world -- within and without -- with a set of assumptions, a set of presuppositions that enable us to interpret the world in what is an intelligent and meaningful way. I was pleased in reading the book by Dr. Kraft, Christianity with Power, to find how clearly he spoke of the world-view of the Enlightenment. One of his most important chapters is entitled "Enlightenment Christianity is Powerless." Allow me to quote from his book.

"In reacting against the excesses of extreme religious credulity, Enlightenment thinkers threw out, or at least raised serious questions about, belief in anything that could not be rationally understood. And these assumptions have become a part of our worldview so that quite unconsciously we have all imbibed their influence from birth." (Charles Kraft, Christianity with Power, Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1989)

Edward Farley in his book Theologia, in which he discusses the fragmentation and unity of theological education, refers to the effects of the Enlightenment. He said,

"Accordingly, in the Enlightenment theologies the older term positive theology took on a new and pejorative meaning. Positive religion, the institutional religion based on supernatural and historical religion, is contrasted to natural religion which rises above the incoherencies of supernaturalism and dogmatism." (p. 64)

The result of this Farley said, "... was a hermeneutics of destruction, a desupernaturalizing of the canon, authority, and Scripture." (p. 65)

I quote these well know authors to show you that my proposition -- that we as Evangelicals have accepted many of the principles -- doctrines -- that has come out of the Enlightenment is recognized by others.

2. What are the basic characteristics of this "world view" of the Enlightenment and upon which our modern civilization and thinking is based? allow me to suggest six. And here I owe a debt to Dr. Holmes and Dr. Kraft.
 - a. Naturalism: In its most extreme view Naturalism is the viewpoint that there is no spiritual world whatsoever and that the universe is self-originating, self-governing, and self-explanatory. The way Naturalism touches us Evangelicals is that we tend to downplay supernaturalism. For example, we rarely think of or speak of prayer as a way of solving problems. And, as Dr. Kraft states we do not think of sickness and its cure as supernatural first -- but in a naturalistic context first -- and then only later in a supernaturalistic way. We have to admit that he is right.
 - b. Materialism: Crass Materialism is the viewpoint that only matter exists. Materialism has had an impact upon us in the way we measure success and security. We must admit that money and possessions are far too important to us. Our security is rarely -- in any practical way -- found in the promises of God.
 - c. Rationalism: The viewpoint that life is basically rational, and that the key to problem solving is simply correct thinking. As Evangelicals we have been impacted by Rationalism in the way we put such emphasis on the things that are seen and understood. How often we say "I can only believe what I understand." And another statement that is even more revealing of our acceptance of some form of Rationalism is, "But I don't understand how that can be" -- when the subject of demons, multiple personality, or instantaneous healing is brought up.

- d. Scientism: I am not speaking of science now -- but scientism -- science as a philosophy that purports to be the basic and the most important world-view. It is the viewpoint that,
- 1). Most if not all the problems of life are open to the scientific method.
 - 2). That the scientific method is the or can be the solution to our problems.
 - 3). That truth is found and established only by the scientific method.
 - 4). That proof comes only by the scientific method.
 - 5). That the scientific method is based on scientific presuppositions.
- e. Humanism: This world-view may be explained as a rejection of the supernatural and the belief that all value is found in mankind. Arthur Holmes is right when he speaks of Humanism causing a "secularization of values." (Contours of a World View, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983. P. 15)

As Evangelicals we reveal our acceptance of Humanism when we speak of our need of fulfillment and tend to think of God as being there -- simply to give us fulfillment. And our Humanism world-view is even more apparent when we say "But God cannot do that," when we hear of election and predestination.

- f. Psychologism: I am not referring to the Christian psychologist or to a viewpoint of psychology and counseling that is developed in harmony with the Bible. What I am referring to is the application of Naturalism, Rationalism, and Humanism to psychology. What I have in mind is the viewpoint that our problems are psychological only in nature and can only be understood and solved within that viewpoint.

For a more extensive explanation of the assumptions that have come from the Enlightenment -- allow me to refer you to the two books already mentioned.

III. The Cause of Our Present Condition.

- A. To state it simply: We have as Evangelicals -- with our roots in the events and theology of the Bible and the Reformation -- have accepted many of the presuppositions of the Enlightenment.
- B. We have adopted a great deal of the thinking of the Enlightenment.

The proof is how we interpret the Bible. While we all hold to the basic doctrines of Scripture -- how we apply and interpret those doctrines -- and the teaching of the Bible shows that we tend to weaken and water-down the message of Scripture.

1. When we are sick we tend to think of the doctor first and then if he cannot help us -- we try prayer.
2. We almost never think of our problems as rooted in the spiritual world. For all practical purposes Paul's statement in Ephesians 6 -- that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers -- simply does not apply to us.
3. We treat hard cases in our churches by sending them to the psychologist or psychiatrist. We almost never consider the problem to be spiritual. It is almost unheard of for a pastor to call his church together to pray with a person about their "problem."

4. Our missions programs and evangelism programs and financial programs in our churches are almost never related to prayer and Bible study -- but more to some technique. It is so much easier to put our trust in a program to sell bonds -- than in prayer.
 5. We have a tendency not to accept the clear teaching of James 5:16. We do not feel comfortable when a person asks us to pray for them in regard to some clear-cut "mental or emotional or physical problem."
 6. We tend to think of Christianity in the past as being characterized by great power, in fact miracles. And we tend to think of the future of Christianity a time in which there will be powerful manifestations of God. But, now, in the present -- today -- we are only too glad to settle for a powerless Christianity. And I'm not talking about signs and wonders. The clear evidence that I am right is seen in the way we regard prayer. In the Bible, prayer is described as one of the most powerful tools God has given us. The greatest promises in all the Bible relates to prayer. Do we view it like this? NO. Too often our prayers are a confession of failure. They are expressions of our hopelessness. We do not believe that we can get things done by prayer. We do not look upon prayer as the solution to our problems. Many of us who profess to be Christians and ministers of the grace of God have settled for a powerless kind of Christianity.
 7. We tend toward making some of the basic doctrines of the Bible to be more and more like a psychological symbol. See the edition of Christianity Today (Feb. 19, 1990) and the article in which the words Hell, Faith, Judgment, Wrath, Sin, and Church are shown to be, in the minds of many Evangelicals, doctrines in some transition.
- C. Some of the roots to the unrest in Evangelical Churches concerning helping people with the enemy -- is due to not really believing in the spiritual world.

IV. The Cure of our Present Condition.

- A. We must examine our world view. Do we really believe the world view of the Bible? Easy to say, "Yes, I believe all the Bible teaches." However: WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH AND BELIEF IS WORKS. If we do not practice what we "believe" it is an evidence that we do not believe it.
- B. Compare our world view with the Biblical world view.
 1. The Christian life:
 - a. Illustration # 1 - Job 1:1, 9, 20-22.
 - 1). Is this a paradigm a pattern that is an explanation of the issues for our daily life? Do we believe the issues here in Job 1 are the same for our daily life?
 - 2). If we say "No" -- what evidence do we have for that world-view?
 - b. Illustration # 2 -- I Samuel 16:13,14; 18:20.

Are the events of our daily life -- living in or out of the will of God -- related this directly with the spiritual world? Are we willing to accept the view here presented -- that choosing to practice error, choosing to live outside of the will of God -- makes one vulnerable to the control of Satan in some areas of life?

c. Illustration # 3 -- I Samuel 17:26, 32-37

Are the issues of life this clearly defined for us? Do we look upon those who are living out of the will of God as defying God? Are His resources and power available to us as to David? If we do not believe this -- what Biblical reasons can we bring forth for our interpretation?

d. Illustration # 4 -- II Cor. 8:9

What do we count valuable as Evangelicals? There is no question that we are Biblical in looking upon salvation and sanctification as so very important. However, along with that belief we also believe that our enjoyment and security in this life is tied to money and possessions. When this verse speaks of "riches" we almost never think of a spiritual security regarding the budget, or the future, even though the context of this verse is speaking of money.

2. The prayer life: Daniel 10:1, 2, 11-13.

Are our prayers as vitally related to the spiritual world and as important to God as described in this passage? Does God need our words? Can He do things through our prayer life? Can we learn to pray so that it is an essential and powerful part of our daily life and ministry?

3. Spiritual ministry: Luke 10:17,18.

Can we minister in such a way that it causes profound effects in the spiritual world?

4. Trials of life: II Corinthians 12:7.

5. Ministry of healing: James 5:14-16.

6. Close relationship of "natural" and "spiritual" worlds: I Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10

7. Description of ourselves: Genesis 1:27.

We are basically spiritual -- not mental, physical, volitional, or emotional. "Spiritual" is the quality of our personhood.

8. Basic problems in life are spiritual: Ephesians 6:12.

Notice the priority of the spiritual in this passage. I must confess with you that this is not how we evaluate our daily life. Something has happened to us to make us accept this mentally but not in any practical way.

C. What should be our response to these passages?

1. We all grant that some interpretation is necessary. However, we must admit that the patterns we see in these passages are not how we evaluate our daily life and ministry.

2. However, we must accept them as more normative than we have before.

a. We must repent of our naturalistic, materialistic, rationalistic, humanistic, scientific, and psychological assumptions that do not fit the Biblical pattern.

- b. We must pray for discernment so we can recognize our deception.
- c. We must be humble, admit we need help, and be willing to change.
- d. We must be willing to learn how to practice the Biblical world view.

V. Now: Where We Have Come From and Where Are We Going?

A. God has always had a remnant of people with a message regarding the enemy.

One of the most revealing books has to do with the history of the confession or affirmation that people were instructed to make at the time of their baptism. The book I am referring to is The Devil at Baptism, written by Henry Kelly. Dr. Kelly starts with the Early Church and brings us into the modern period. This book supports the broad thesis of my sermon -- we have a long history in which supernaturalism has been slowly but surely divorced from practical day-by-day life.

William Gurnall, The Christian in Complete Armour, 1662-1665. now published by the Banner of Truth Trust.

John Bunyan, The Holy War, 1682

Pastor Johann Blumhardt (1805-1880) and the account of how he lead one of his parishoners to victory over Satan in the book Blumhardt's Battle: A Conflict with Satan

Jesse Penn-Lewis and Evan Roberts, War on the Saints, 1912

Charles Usher, Spiritual Equipment for the Last Days. 1920

B. Some of our Charismatic Friends have been Active in this Area. To name only a few.

Don Basham, Deliver Us from Evil, (Chosen Books, 1972)

Michael Harper, Spiritual Warfare, (Logos International, 1970)

Michael Scanlan and Randall Cirner Deliverance from Evil Spirits, (Servant publications, 1980)

C. Some further publications.

Books by Dr. Kurt Koch, Christian Counseling and Occultism, (Kregels, 1965)

Books by Merrill F. Unger Biblical Demonology, (Scripture Press, 1952)
Demons in the World Today, (Tyndale House, 1972)
What Demons can Do To Saints, (Moody Press, 1977)

Russell J. Meade, Handbook on Deliverance, (Creation House, 1973)

Dr. Mark Bubeck, The Adversary, (Moody Press, 1981)
Overcoming the Adversary, (Moody Press, 1984)

Dr. C. Fred Dickason Angels, Elect and Evil, Moody Press, 1975.
Demon Possession and the Christian, 1987.

Charles Swindoll, Demonism published by Multnomah Press, 1981

D. Some Crucial Issues Regarding Future Acceptance.

1. We must be careful regarding terminology: Perhaps avoiding the words "demon possession" and utilizing such concepts as "inner control." Too many think if they can reject "demon possession" then they can hold the enemy has almost no "control" over the believer.
2. Be careful not to give the impression that the key to a successful Christian life is getting rid of the enemy. We know it is only one aspect of the Gospel and that the person and work of Jesus Christ is the central key.
3. We must avoid giving the impression that all sin is caused directly by the enemy and the person involved has little if any responsibility. (Utilize a check list)
4. We must always show that our work with the enemy is simply the practical application of the clear message of the Bible.
5. We must try to get our local church involved with us in some way. Both for prayer support and for the education of the church.

E. We are facing difficult days.

1. The continual weakening of truth in evangelical circles will probably continue.
2. The acceptance of error makes our work harder.
 - a. The relativism which started in the 1920s
 - b. Liberalism, abortion, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, witchcraft, and the indifference of Evangelicals will all give power to the enemy.
 - c. The New Age movement is sweeping our land. This is a counterfeit to the Biblical view of supernaturalism. It is a strong enemy and is being accepted by many.

Conclusion

- A. Again -- the theme of this sermon and many of its subjects must be given a great deal more study.
- B. We owe it to ourselves and for those to whom we minister to understand the spiritual world and our place in it.

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