

Spiritual Warfare

by Bob Utley

Bob Utley's sermon on spiritual warfare emphasizes the importance of recognizing and engaging in the spiritual conflicts we face daily as Christians.

Duration: 35:25

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Armor"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual warfare and the need for Christians to be equipped with the full armor of God to stand against the schemes of the devil. It challenges believers to engage in prayer, study the Bible, and live out the gospel boldly in a self-centered world, highlighting the significance of maintaining a biblical worldview and actively participating in the spiritual battle around us.

Transcript

I want to review just a minute before I get into today's message. I certainly feel you praying for me. I certainly believe you want to hear from the Spirit of God.

I'm so gratified to be prayed for because I do know that spiritual power does not come from any human being. It comes from God's book, God's Son, and God's Spirit, amen? And all of us say we want to hear from him as long as he doesn't disrupt our lives, but I promise you the Spirit of God wants to disrupt your life. I promise you that.

I promise you American Christianity may be the weakest form the world has ever known. Now, I think the most powerful messages that I know anything about come out of the practical section of the book of Ephesians, a capstone theology book from Paul written to many churches to prepare them for the coming conflict. He talked about that it is every individual Christian's personal, intentional, daily responsibility to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And when we are distracted by the color of carpet and the kind of translation and on and on and on that we divide over, it's a spiritual disaster for the people of God. We are called on at whatever cost, personally, individually, intentionally, to do whatever it takes to maintain the health and growth of the body of Christ, amen? Secondly, in that first message I talked to you about, I think the radical truth that must be recaptured that there is no distinction in the New Testament between clergy and laity, that every born-again child of God is a called, gifted, full-time minister of Jesus Christ. And until we regain the New

Testament emphasis on the place and purpose of the giftedness of the body of Christ, now I realize that there are some appendix in here, but a good body doesn't live very long without a healthy appendix.

We all have our place. We all have a purpose. And only together can we do the task we've been called to do.

Now, the problem in saying that, called to unity, called to giftedness, is how do we do that? So last Sunday night I talked about the filling of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing permanent, eternal, and divine that happens in the world without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This is the age of the Holy Spirit.

It was inaugurated by the Messiah, but this is the age of the Spirit. And I'm so glad we are talking about him, but there is no way without the Spirit's presence that we can have the energy and power to be the people of God. And I use the analogy which I want to reintroduce today because I'm going to use it again in this message, that there is a spiritual door with a handle on our side, that the concept of biblical covenant, which has caused so much confusion as we have fought over, does the Bible teach the sovereignty of God or does the Bible teach the free will of man? And the answer is, absolutely.

The sovereign God has chosen to set up an agenda and a set of conditions to which he demands that we respond and continue to respond by repentance, faith, obedience, and perseverance. So it has never been a question, is it all of God or is it all of man? It is a cooperative spiritual effort. And this spiritual door with a handle on your side means that God did not kick down the door because of his great love for you to be saved.

You had to invite him in. The same is true of the Spirit-filled life. We talked about that there's a command for us to ever be filled, which means we must, after salvation, purposefully, intentionally continue to open this door daily for a fresh infilling of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to face life in a fallen world.

Now, today, I'd like to continue that theme. If you would open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6, as you remember, the message on the filling of the Holy Spirit ran from the present passive imperative, ever be filled with the Spirit, in 5:18, and it ran all the way through 6:9 because there are no chapter divisions and verse divisions that are inspired. They are simply a means in the Middle Ages to help us find text quickly.

And we have allowed this human division of the Bible to cause us to lose focus of the literary units where the major truths are taught. Now, have you ever heard somebody say, what does it mean when a Baptist preacher takes his watch off? Absolutely nothing. Well, the same thing is true when a biblical person says, finally.

Have you ever heard the word finally 30 minutes before the prayer? Well, that's what Paul is doing. Finally, it literally means to the rest, to the rest. And usually it's used as a transition to a new point, but I submit to you this unique grammatical feature of this present passive imperative in 5:18 is matched in 6:10 by another present passive imperative.

Now again, the door with the handle on your side is in view. Notice that this is a command every day to which you must respond. Yes, the power is of God, but you must allow, you must receive, you must invite, you must provide the opportunity for the will and power of God to flow into your life on a regular, daily, continual basis.

What kills me about the evangelical gospel being preached today is we have somehow turned the sinner's prayer into the end of the deal when biblically it's the beginning of the deal. When you trust Christ, that's

not the end of anything. That's the beginning of everything.

The gospel is a gate and a road, a gate and a road. And we have so focused on the gate, we have under-emphasized the road. And that's what I've been talking about is the road, the Christian life, the ability to function in a fallen world as a unique representative of Jesus Christ.

That's the goal. I tried to shock you by saying that the goal of Christianity is not heaven when you die, but Christ-likeness now. I wish I could penetrate that into your minds because that is a radical statement that goes against most of what I hear about pray this prayer, and then no matter what you do or where you go, you'll go to heaven when you die, which is a lie.

By their fruits ye shall know them. What happened to that text? Now, in this text, I would title this spiritual warfare. This is not something we talk about a lot, and I must admit as a theologian, I'm embarrassed about some of the books and stuff that I hear on this.

As a theologian, I wonder, why is there not a gift of exorcism listed in any of the gifts, and why is this never mentioned after the gospel enacts? Why, as a New Testament preacher, and I'm not given more revelatory information on how to deal with the demonic. Why don't I have more information in this area? I wish I knew, but some of the wild, weird stuff that has developed in history and is now taught as being the will of God scares me to death. I guess it is not so much that I know how to deal with the spiritual conflict as that I know there is a spiritual conflict.

I do not believe the American church knows there's a spiritual conflict. We just think there's four Sundays in a month. That's our view of Christianity.

Four Sundays, four hours at a certain building, and that's what Christianity is all about. Wrong. Now, remember that this is written against false teachers that we have now in the modern world characterized as Gnostics, from the Greek word for knowledge, to know.

And these false teachers, you got to know something of their theology to know what Paul is saying. They said that there's always been two things, spirit or God and matter or stuff. Now, that may not sound radical.

The Bible says there was nothing, and out of nothing, God spoke. So biblically, that's untrue, but it's Greek philosophy, basically, two eternal things. They would say God is good and matter, atoms, is evil.

If you know anything about Greek writings, they blame the problems in the world on matter. That's why the Greeks would say everybody has a divine spark, and at death, that spark goes back to an impersonal God, and the body is the prison house of the soul. Do you hear what they're saying? That our real problem is flesh.

Well, now, wait a minute, because Jesus is said to come in the flesh. Now, how can Jesus be fully God and fully man and flesh be evil, and yet Jesus without sin? I want to remind you, 1 John 4, 1 through 3 says, if you do not believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man, you are of the little a antichrist spirit. This is no minor doctrine.

So here, what looked innocently became a major attack on the person of Jesus Christ. Now, we would say as evangelical Christians, and we sing it in the psalm, the cross is the key to our forgiveness. Well, not for the Gnostics.

They would say it's not that Jesus died for your sins. It's not that you can trust him and have eternal life. No, no, no.

Since God is holy and matter is evil, between a holy God, there has to be a series of lesser gods until one is far enough removed that they can form matter, and they would call that the Yahweh of the Old Testament. So the way to be saved for them is to join their group and get this secret knowledge that they claim that Jesus gave them orally. As I drove to your church today from the hotel, the Dallas Scientology Church is on the way, and that is a group that says that if you give me \$10,000, I'll give you the new level of spirituality.

That's the group that says we've got secret knowledge, and if you will come join our church, we will tell you this secret knowledge. That's Gnosticism. Gnosticism is all around us, and we don't recognize it.

I submit to you that Christianity is a banquet table with everything to eat that can be eaten there, and God says, come and eat to every individual Christian, and you don't need a guru or a Illuminati or a PhD or a high IQ or somebody else. The problem is everything's available, and God's people aren't coming to eat. There's nothing secret in the book.

There's nothing you have to search and search. For years of my life, I thought if I'm really, really good, God may give me more truth. God is sending all the truth he has, and God's people, for whatever reason, are not responding and receiving.

The problem is not the sender. The problem is the receiver. There is not a hunger today in America for the Word of God.

It's almost like in academic circles where I function, that if the Bible says it, it's got to be untrue. That's almost a bias against spiritual things in our day. These Gnostic false teachers not only depreciated the person of Christ, but they depreciated the work of Christ but tried to keep the same spiritual words to act like they're spiritual.

I do not know what to say. I do believe America is a spiritual person. I see it on the ads.

I see it in the literature. I see it in the bestsellers. But for whatever reason, Americans by the hundreds of thousands have said, my search for spirituality is unaffected by a local Christian church.

We've so poorly lived out what we believe in the real world that nobody believes we're genuine. We have such a dichotomy between what we say and how we live. We have such a fight among ourselves.

Who wants to join a group like ours? Well, not America. God help us if something doesn't happen to the church in America, we may close the door to all her churches and maybe that will be better than a sick, half-hearted, shallow, perverted understanding of the gospel of the New Testament. I hear people talk about Christianity on the news and I want to throw up my television set.

If you do not know your Bible for yourself, you're going to be led around by every charismatic, strong personality you come with and the trick is the church of Jesus Christ does not know her Bible. And if you think open windows is Bible study, you don't know what Bible study is. We come to Sunday school, we haven't prayed, we haven't studied, and we're going to come listen to somebody else tell us what they think and that's all we want because they haven't ruffled our feathers, haven't told us something we haven't heard.

We say we want a spiritual revival. What we want is somebody to pat us on the back and tell us how wonderful we are when we all got spiritual cancer of American Christianity. Doctors don't do us a favor when they lie to us about the diagnosis.

Doctors don't do us a favor when they put a Band-Aid on a cancer. What we need is radical Christianity. Should be an amen, but it's so hard.

This is a worldview issue. Do you mean that we are in spiritual conflict in Dallas, Texas, on a Sunday in October? That's what I'm saying to you. Do you mean when I go eat after I leave here that there is a spiritual conflict? That's what I'm telling you.

Do you mean between my wife and I when we drive home there is conflict? Yes, we live in a fallen world and we're impacted by spiritual forces beyond our control, and the worst part about it is we're ignorant of the spiritual forces arrayed against us and the purpose of our relationship with Christ. We're into a what's-in-it-for-me American Christianity instead of a what's-in-it-for-the-kingdom New Testament gospel corporate focus. Finally, not me, Paul, finally, be strong in the Lord in the strength of his might.

That's a song we sang. This is that command. This is that passive voice.

I can't be strong, but I must allow God to make me strong, and it's a command, not a suggestion. We've let this clergy-laity thing take the responsibility from the vast majority of Christians and put it on a few staff members. It mentions here, and I think we've got to remember it again, put on the full armor of God.

I'm going to talk about that in just a minute, but listen to this next phrase in verse 11, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, this Gnostic levels of eons, against powers, against world forces of wickedness, spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. Now, friends, what I must remember, and I hope I can communicate this, God helped me, you prayed for me, now I hope you can receive it. Our conflict is not with Sally and Fred and Jack and the personnel committee and the neighbors and the in-laws.

Our conflict is with evil. The only eternal thing in this world is people. No institution is eternal.

People are eternal. And every person is someone for whom Jesus died. And we've got to remember that the conflicts we face in church, in the family, in business, in the neighborhood, are not personal.

They are spiritual in nature. And the world, it wants to see how spirit-filled people react to the conflict that's common to all of us in daily life. And when our lives look exactly like the lost world in its reaction, nothing is communicated about the uniqueness and wonder of the gospel.

Now, I want you to think right now of the conflicts that are active in your life. And if you don't have any conflicts, you're not breathing. I want to remind you that how we treat people says something about our love for God.

I want to say that again. I don't care who the person is. How we treat people says something about our love for God because that person is made in the image and likeness of God.

See, we get all down to shape and upset over this or that when the problem is far bigger than you and I and this or that. The problem is cosmic. Right now, in every one of our lives, there are people who are related to us, our sphere of influence, whose eternal destiny depends on the validity of our spirituality.

Divine appointments come and go every day as we walk through life oblivious to a spiritual conflict that whirls around our lives and the truths we claim to believe but do not live. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers. Now, notice it says, put on the whole armor of God.

I know many theologians who try to say this, the helmet means this and the breastplate means this. I do not think we have enough information to do that. This is obviously a quote and there are a series of quotes here from Isaiah.

In Isaiah 59, 17, Yahweh is depicted as a warrior fully dressed in battle array that goes to fight on behalf of his people. I think Paul is alluding to that, but it may not be that. As you know, Paul wrote this in prison, and every eight hours the Praetorian guard changed and two more soldiers were chained to that fat little Jewish evangelist.

Can you just hear Paul say, bring two more in? How would you like to be chained to a little evangelist for eight hours? Remember when Paul said, I'm in prison, but the gospel has penetrated the Praetorian guard? Man's in prison and the kingdom's being impacted because he knew who he was and why he was here. So it may be the soldier he saw or it may be the Old Testament quote because there's four more quotes coming from Isaiah. Whichever it is, it's God is a warrior.

I guess I would say this to you. I'm using an analogy that's trying to help me explain spiritual truths. All analogies break down at some point, so don't get hung up on the analogy.

I think when we become a Christian, that all that we need for the spiritual life is provided at that moment. We have the fullness of the Spirit. We have this spiritual armament, but the spiritual armament is not implemented.

It's available. And we've got to know, number one, that there is a spiritual conflict, number two, that God's power and love has provided everything we need for the spiritual conflict, and then we must have the personal intentionality, the door with the handle on our side, to pick up the spiritual armament and implement it in our lives. I have known Christians.

Matter of fact, the Christians that cause the most trouble, in my opinion, are Christians who've been in the church for 40 years and are still, baby, what's in it for me? I'll have it my way Christians. They don't understand the spiritual conflict. They don't understand the spiritual provision.

They don't understand the purpose of why we're here. It's always about me and mine and what I want and what I need and what I like. This isn't about you.

It's about him. Wake up. Grow up.

Get up. I almost started crying during the song when I saw that point about heaven, that consummation is coming, and the Spirit spoke to me and said, not yet. We're not at rest yet.

We're not home yet. It's not over yet. We haven't seen the city without hands yet.

It's not time to rest yet. It's not time to pat ourselves on the back yet. We're not the church triumphant yet.

We are the church militant. We are the church now. We are the only hands and feet and voice that Jesus has on the planet, and we sit in our padded pews and pick at each other and wonder why the world doesn't want to join us on our padded, air-conditioned pews.

I drive down this part of Dallas and I see huge buildings like this empty, and it reminds me of Europe. And in 20 years, if this church doesn't start reaching the people in this community, it'll be like the cathedrals of Europe, museums to 20th-century Christianity, but not relevant for the lives of anybody within the shadow of the steeple because we want to sit and sing instead of sacrifice and go. I just wonder if Jesus was in town.

He'd attend one of our churches, put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day. Now, the evil day here is not some great revival, some great crusade, some great spiritual event, some great temptation. The evil day is Monday morning, 8 o'clock.

The evil day faces us recurrently every day, and if we don't see that, we don't understand the spiritual battle. We don't understand the necessity of the present. We don't understand the command to ever be filled with the Spirit and the command to be strong in the Lord daily.

To all of God's people, this command is given, not to a select few, to all. If it is true that down where it says, let me drop 18, I see the point. The first, and I've heard this said by commentators, the only offensive weapon is in verse 18.

I do not believe that. I think there's another one, I'll show it to you, but verse 18 certainly is an offensive weapon. Not verse 18, I'm sorry.

I'm looking for the sword of the Spirit in verse 17. I want to say this. I am a Bible teacher.

I do think about Bible interpretation every day. It's who I am. It's what I do.

People say to me, you're so radical and passionate. I realize that I'm in one ditch. I realize that I am radical on this.

I realize that I am over the top on this, but I feel like that God has allowed me over the top to maybe speak to those who are on the other extreme. And so what I want to say to you is about the word of God, and we use all kind of adjectives for it. We buy the most expensive study Bibles in leather, and they sit around our house unread.

The Bible is not holy in its presence. It's holy in its message. And if it is unread and unknown, it is nothing more than dead cow, dead trees, and soot.

Nothing holy about this book I hold. It's the God who speaks through this book that's holy. We're content to buy a Bible to match our shoes, but not read the Bible that sits on our table.

I teach at a Christian university, and the greatest young people I know come to Christian universities, and they have all the answers to the issues. But when you ask them where they got it, they don't have a clue because they got it from Mama or Nashville or favorite book or TV preacher, which means they don't know the Bible, they just know Baptist traditions. And if you don't think Baptists have traditions, change the order of service next week.

If I ask you, and I think it's a fair question to ask any Christian about any subject, can you show me in the Bible where you got that? It's not an ugly question. It's not an ugly question. That's a fair question.

Can you show me in the Bible where you got that? Now, we may disagree over the Bible, amen. I don't have any problem about that. I'm smart enough to know I don't know, but I want to tell you this.

When people start saying things, I got an email just a couple of weeks ago where somebody said to me, if you don't agree with my position about a certain translation, you are an apostate liberal. Well, why not just kill me as a conservative teacher calling me an apostate liberal? What cuss word can you use to strike to the very heart of my character by trying to call me that? Over some little issue I don't agree with you on? Holy moly, who do you think you are? Do you think God agrees with your theology and you didn't even come on the scene till the 1600s in England? We just need a little more humility. We also need a whole lot more Bible knowledge.

I go to church in the town where my school is. Many of the administrators and leaders go to my Sunday school class, and we get in there, and somebody reads a text, and somebody reads a text, and somebody reads a text, and the teacher says, now, what do you think? I submit to you I don't care what you think. I care a whole lot what Paul thinks.

Nobody's prayed. Nobody's done any personal study. They just come for a few hours of what's happening with the football game, how is your grandkids or my grandkids, and five minutes of devotional Christianity, and we wonder why the church is sick.

I could embarrass you and me by giving you a content test on the New Testament, not theology, not interpretation, just a content about items in the New Testament and embarrass you and me because we're content in our day of professionals and skilled to let others tell us what the Bible says and never have even read it. If you don't know the Bible for yourself, you're vulnerable for every new weird fad that comes down the pike, and there's a bunch of them in American Christianity. Knowledge of the Word of God.

Do you have a time where you read the Bible? I don't talk about the Bible. I'm saying is there a time in your life where you turn, I was going to use an adjective, but I'll leave it off, TV off. You've seen that rerun three times.

Turn it off and pick up what you say is the life-changing eternal book and read through one book. The second offensive weapon is in verse 18. I've never seen so many alls, A-L-L, in a verse in my whole life.

Look at the alls. You say, I didn't bring my Bible. There's the first problem.

I didn't match my outfit. Well, leave it at home. With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit.

With this in view, be on alert with all perseverance and petition for all saints. I used to grapple about politics. This one did something I didn't like.

That one did something. I was just fussing in my spirit, and the Holy Spirit said to me, not audibly, now I don't get audibles, said to me, you're griping, but you never prayed for that person. You never asked me to protect them or fill them or speak to them.

You're griping, but you never prayed. Do you mean that we have the kind of government that we deserve? I hope you know that no matter who we elect, nobody can solve the spiritual problems of America. I hope you know this is not a Christian nation.

I don't care whose statistics you use. This is pagan. We got a few names on our coins, but the name isn't in the heart of our people, and nobody can fix that until one heart at a time turns to Jesus Christ.

Are we praying for world evangelization? Are we praying for God's will in the life of our nation? Are we praying for the salvation of our community? Now we're praying for, God, fix my ingrown toenail. Give me more in my 401K. God, give me an easy life and bless my grandchildren.

And we wonder why the church isn't making an impact on America. Self-centered materialism is the hallmark of the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century in Western culture. You say, your humor's not here today.

No, my humor's not here today. My humor's weeping over a broken church that doesn't even know she's broken and a spiritual conflict that we're prepared for. It will just take up the challenge to be available.

It's far more easy to gripe on the way home than it is to get out of your comfort zone and be the Christian God called you to be Monday through Friday. Then you won't be showing up by yourself at a building on Sunday. I'm always humbled by this verse.

I'm always moved. You know, I pray, God, I don't want to get emotional. But if it would help communicate your heart to these, the people you love, I'm willing to do whatever you want.

I come to 19 and I remember that Paul, where he is, he didn't pray, God, get me out. He didn't pray, God, get these soldiers off me. He didn't pray, Lord, I need more and more for me.

He prays, let my mouth be open, and with boldness I may preach the gospel. I know my Bible well enough to know in 2 Corinthians 4, 6, 11, Paul tells me about his life. Beat up, starving, cold, betrayed, and the man's not praying for change in my circumstances.

He's praying for power in gospel presentation. I'm humbled by that. I'm humbled by that.

Lord, I don't know how else to reach your people. I know shouting doesn't do it. If your book doesn't do it and your spirit doesn't do it, I don't think we're going to be reached.

We're just so content with the way things are and we're just so caught up in me and mine and more. We're just so caught up on fighting among ourselves. We're just so caught up with pettiness and judgmentalism.

God, have mercy on us. We pray you'd convict us that we need to be studying your word. We pray that you would convict us.

We need to be praying for one another. We pray that you would open our eyes to a biblical worldview of daily spiritual conflict and how we act and how we react determines the eternal destiny of people that we've come in contact with. God, forgive us for self-centered living.

Open our minds, open our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

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