

Reality of Spiritual Warfare

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the reality of spiritual warfare and the importance of living a life of humility, love, and prayer to resist Satan's attacks.

Duration: 36:47

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the attempts of Satan to destroy young believers who have recently made professions of faith. The speaker emphasizes the importance of repentance, seeking forgiveness from the Lord, meditating on scripture, and praising God as ways to combat discouragement and depression. The speaker also encourages the congregation to prioritize prayer, repentance, and unity in order to effectively combat the challenges they may face in their spiritual journey. The sermon concludes with a reminder that while the road may not be easy, God will use the believers in their community and beyond if they remain steadfast in their faith.

Transcript

And I hope that this morning you'll get excited about reading the Bible through. I want us to look at the book of Acts and the chapter that's not so well known, chapter 23. I want to share with you the reality of spiritual warfare.

The reality of spiritual warfare. We see in chapter 23 of the book of Acts a conspiracy to kill the apostle Paul. I know that there has been a conspiracy to destroy the ministry of Billy Graham from the earliest days.

There's a conspiracy against ministers in general. This fast-selling novel, This Present Darkness, rapidly becoming one of the most widely distributed books in the world, points out the conspiracy against God's people in the heavenlies. And we know what Ephesians 6 says about fiery darts, about spiritual warfare, about wickedness in high places.

There's a group of evil people in California that would send wicked women for counseling to pastors. This is 25 years ago. These women would seduce the pastors.

They'd get photos of the ministers in bed with these women and blackmail them. That's 25 years ago. Do you think they've improved in their methodology? Have we seen any Christian leaders in this country, or America, or Canada, or Australia, or New Zealand, wiped out because of fiery darts, of money, of lust? We've seen many.

I believe that's one of the hard questions that Wogan tried to put to Billy Graham. Let's read this. Verse 12, When it was day, certain of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

And there were more than 40 who made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and they said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, and we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore, ye, with a counsel, signify to the chief captain that he may bring him unto you tomorrow, as though you would inquire something more perfectly concerning him.

And we, before he comes near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain, for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

And he took him and brought him to the chief captain and said, Paul the prisoner, call me unto him and ask me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto you. Then the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately and asked him, What is that that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee, that thou wouldst bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them, for they lie in wait for him of them.

More than forty men who have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now are they ready looking for a prisoner, or a promise, excuse me, looking for a promise from you. So the chief captain then let the young man depart and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shown these things to me.

And so they removed Paul by night and took him to another place. Now many times I speak in ministers' meetings and missionary meetings, and many times in those meetings I've spoken on this text. But this is one of the first times I've ever spoken on this text just in a normal church meeting.

And I hope you can make the association, I hope you can contextualize what we see here in this passage into your own situation, even though you may not be a Christian leader. I had the burden to share this morning something about how Satan will attempt to destroy those young babes who have made professions of faith this week. Keep in mind that fifty percent of the people who've made decisions who went forward are already believers.

One of our OM women is working right through the night, tallying up the statistics so we're getting rather accurate information, at least we hope. And that's quite normal. In a Billy Graham meeting, many who make a commitment or go forward are making a recommitment of their lives to Christ.

That's quite normal. I've done it a number of times in my life in different meetings, especially when I was a young Christian. In my own meetings to believers, I often call people to recommitment to Christ, to make a deeper commitment to the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes I maybe just have them stand and then pray together. Other times I may call them to come forward. I believe the key to world evangelism is in the hands of the average Christian.

And it's as believers are revived and renewed and make deeper commitments to Christ that we can see so much more happen. To me, this is a time for all of us as believers to make a deeper commitment to God, whether we go forward in a Billy Graham meeting or not. We can do this in our own room.

Many people are turned off the church. I talked to a friend of mine yesterday morning. I said, where are you going to church now? She said, you know, she's through with the nominations.

She's through with the churches. But she says she still loves the Lord. I hope to meet her tonight, speaking in a church near Richmond this evening.

People have been through very, very hard experiences. Don't think it's just with established churches. The new movements, which I'm very much involved in the last 20 years, now have hundreds, thousands of people who have gone through these new churches and have burnt out and are hurt and have quit.

In some cases, they've overthrown the Christian faith completely. You know, as God's people, sometimes we do get into a little bit of fantasy land. It's great to have Billy Graham back, but some of us lived here after Billy was here 10, 15 years ago when there was such backbiting, gossip, and criticism of him, on little details, something his wife did wrong.

And even God's people were quite arrogant, quite proud, quite manifest in their bitter statements against Billy Graham. And very few of them ever wrote to him. You know, Billy Graham's just an ordinary person.

Of course he's made mistakes. Far more than you. Because the more you do, the more mistakes you're going to make.

And some of you haven't made any big mistakes in your life because you haven't done anything. You haven't done anything. And maybe you don't like to be told that, but in your heart, you know it's true.

You're not filled with the Spirit. You're not reaching out to touch people for Christ. Paul said very clear, I am crucified with Christ.

How totally different from the pride and the arrogance and the backbiting that is so prevalent in our churches in Britain today. Some people say we need revival. That's the understatement of the century.

And if we think Billy Graham's visit is going to solve our problems without a lot of effort on our part, a lot of tears, a lot of repentance, a lot of hard work, a lot of being stripped of self, and taking the mask off, we're just deceived. It's like thinking if you get a real dynamic pastor in here, that will make the church extra special. It may, it may not.

I'm very involved in local churches, actually more than I am OM. And many a dynamic pastor has come in, have blown the church in too. The key in the church is not firstly the pastor.

The key, the people. And our prayer life, our love, our spiritual maturity, our understanding of what we are in as believers, this is spiritual warfare. Satan will not be happy with you tripping and falling on your nose a few times.

We've all done that. Satan wants to destroy you. Do you know that? Do you understand that? Do you live in the light of that? In terms of your use of time, in terms of your approach to scripture, in terms of your relationships with others, and keeping a clean slate, in your attitude, in your disposition, because it's easy to have an evangelical smile, but it's not so easy to have a godly disposition.

That's where my failure has been. Because without Jesus Christ working with me, I can have a disposition of a snake. And I think of Father's Day, and I think at Father's Day of the great patience and love that my wife has had for me these 29 years.

And I'm a miracle. For a character like me to be married to one woman for 29 years, it's like a dinosaur dancing a jig on a pin. And people knew that when I was saved.

Because at 16 I was into pornography, I was into business, I was a liar, a loud mouth. New York City was my turf. And when people saw me come to Christ in that Billy Graham meeting, you can be sure they were mighty skeptical.

And when I started preaching six weeks later at 17, six months later at 17 years of age, you can be sure most people weren't too positive. Just like when I landed here 27 years ago, most people backed up about 100 yards and said it was nice meeting you. Because I am.

I'm a naturally bombastic, obnoxious, offensive type, loud mouth, gum chewing, overbearing, impossible, let's only have him once every 10 years, American. But the amazing thing is God saved me. And God's kept me every day for 20, no, 33 years.

Now some of you are going to twig how old I am. I don't care because the 50s are great. It was the fabulous 40s, it's the fighting 50s.

And if you want to fight, meet me by the bookstall. But I don't use my hands. My weapons are love.

And that's what the Word of God teaches. I'm concerned about the people who flock out of Crystal Palace this coming week, having made a decision for Jesus Christ. I'm concerned if any of them have any contact with you or with me, will we be a blessing to them or will we be an offense? I don't know if there's any young babe in Christ here this morning.

You will get babes in Christ into your church to the degree that you're willing to go and find them and take the initiative. Because a lot of people make a profession of faith on a Thursday and don't even end up in a church on a Sunday because no one linked with them, no one got a hold of them. Now I believe in this well-organized campaign that is probably being avoided.

But you see, people can go to a church and if we aren't wise, we aren't discerning, and Tozer said the greatest gift needed in the church today was discernment, we can be a stumbling block to those young babes. And I would just remind you, as I remind myself, of the vulnerability of the young believer. The vulnerability of the young believer.

Some of the people who make decisions are not converted people. They have made a decision, they are on the way. If there's good follow-up, if there's love, history proves this, Billy Graham states this, they will come probably across the line into true conversion somewhere in the weeks to come.

Others are soundly converted at the moment of those meetings. So much is determined, and humanly speaking, on the church, on our reception of these people, these babes in Christ. Even meeting them after, meeting them the next morning, the next morning is one of the roughest periods for the babe in Christ, because he is going to have peers, he is going to have relatives, and I know because I come from that background, who are going to say, this is just an emotional trip.

There is an enormous amount of sarcasm, there's an enormous amount of cynicism flowing out in present-day Britain and in the States, so that if the babe in Christ is exposed to this cynicism, even some joke by some comedian on television, who are highly gifted cynics with their subtle British humor, that can make a young Christian feel like he has been conned. Especially when he discovers that people also would like him to give his money to their activities, and people are offended by the aggressive efforts, far more common in America, that are used to get their money when they are just a baby Christian, trying to figure out step A, step B in the Christian life. Let us humble ourselves in these days.

Let us open our homes, because if we open our stadiums and we don't open our homes, we play the hypocrite. Unless we have some special crisis in our home that makes it impossible, and that could be, that could be, because opening your home is not a small thing. If your husband or your wife doesn't agree with this, then you have to hold up.

Easily, when Billy Graham comes and there's a great campaign, Christians of a certain type get over-committed. They get too much involved in all this, and they open their home too much, and they go to too many meetings, and in the process of that, they get other attacks from Satan. Their children, their own children, maybe didn't want to go to that meeting, or maybe would like to see daddy a little more.

Some of you have read the article of the missing father, who is so caught up in Christian activities and important campaigns and counseling, that the children never see him. I speak from first-hand experience again, as one who was away from my children perhaps too often. Yes, Satan has a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour.

There's another part of Scripture that says Satan comes often as an angel of light, so subtle. He often can come with slick doctrinal clichés. He's a specialist in easy answers, and he is a great promoter of spiritual pride and religious arrogance, which so often is an offense.

I know a young woman who made a decision in a meeting. She was so sensitive, she came from a difficult background. She stood in a meeting to make a decision for Christ, and in the back counseling room somebody came down really heavy on her, that she must get the second blessing or the third blessing, and she must get this gift, and that gift completely blew her away.

Never did she ever step back in that church. It is possible to try to overdose a young Christian. It is possible to come on too strong, and even as you have a babe in Christ in your home, or you meet a seeker, someone who's not a Christian but is a seeker, don't feel it always has to be spiritual things.

It always has to be some heavy exhortation. Maybe they're sleeping with their boyfriend, and you feel suddenly you're John the Baptist, and you're going to really point out the dangers of this, and that AIDS will soon come jumping up through the loo, and they will be stricken dead. Perhaps that's a bit of overstatement, but I think you know what I mean.

As Christians we come on too strong. If it wasn't for my own ability somehow to bring in a little humor in what I share, I would come on too strong. You've got to have a sense of humor if you're going to be among God's people.

And I as a baby Christian found some of God's people. I found them as a new Christian a real pain in the neck. Now don't get feeling all guilty.

I had to work that through, and I did in the Word of God, and understood that Christians were human, and being born again doesn't mean you go from a one-talent person to a ten-talent person. It doesn't mean you put a Jaguar engine in a Volkswagen. And one of the greatest things that will help young babes in Christ to grow is simply accepting them, and loving them, and being their friend, and not condemning them if they're still going in the pub to meet some of their old friends, and not condemning them if somehow they still light up their cigarette, and somehow they're still doing things that are considered worldly among the Lord's people who have got their own sins, which are far uglier than going to the pub or lighting up a fag.

When will we be honest about pride? When will we be honest about religious arrogance? When will we be honest about our own traditionalism in the way we do tend to look down our noses at people of other races, and people from different churches, and just let 1 Corinthians 13 roar through our lives like a mighty tidal wave? That's what we need. If we're going to see biblical follow-up on all these who profess faith, and with that we can win men even like Terry Wogan to Jesus Christ. I wonder how many of us ever sit down and write letters, maybe looking for something we can compliment someone on.

That's the way to start, with a compliment, not a criticism. If you haven't learned how to compliment people, you have no credentials whatsoever for criticism. And maybe the next time Wogan or somebody else you see on TV does something good, write to them.

And then send them maybe a good book. It's amazing what you can do with books. I just wrote another letter to Maggie, Margaret Thatcher, and got a lovely letter back from Downing Street.

I sent her *Loving God* by Charles Colson. Brilliant. And I sent with it my own book, *No Turning Back*.

I thought she might need that title. *Satan as a Roaring Lion Seeketh Whom He May Devour*. Not just the Apostle Paul, though Satan targets people that are on fire for God.

Satan targets men like Billy Graham. That's why he's been so cautious and careful in his relationship with the opposite sex, classified as a Puritan. He's had a policy that he wouldn't go alone with other women.

We took that policy into our whole movement. I'm with a fellowship known as Operation Mobilization. And we decided also to walk a cautious road and we encouraged our leaders, not as a fixed policy, but in general to avoid just going around publicly or even privately with someone of the opposite sex, especially if you're a leader.

People have tried to push loose living women into Billy's arms and get a picture. Usually he has another man with him or his own wife. What a miracle that this man has kept a clean slate all these years.

And believe me, the press have tried in the States to destroy him, especially when these other TV evangelists collapsed. What men like Billy have had to go through is quite awesome. But Satan is not just out to get the Billy Graham.

Satan hates the weakest saint, especially if he or she are learning how to pray. How are you doing in that area? I was encouraged that you're going to have your prayer meeting, even during a Billy Graham meeting. I think that's good planning.

We actually canceled our main Tuesday night prayer meeting in O.M. Bromley, the international office of O.M., I don't know if you know, is in Bromley in Forest Hill. The British office is near Oswestry in a county that I can't even pronounce. Sharpshire.

Believe it or not, this summer over 1,500 British people have signed up for Love Europe. And the letters have just come back from the continent saying the numbers for Love Europe have zoomed over the 6,500 mark, never in the history of our work have we had so many people mobilizing simultaneously for evangelism. Several hundred of them will be hitting the great city of Bristol, as Britain has now been targeted not only as a great sending field, which it has been for our work.

We have over 300 full-time British people in O.M., but also as an evangelistic target field. And our new evangelistic program in England is called LUKE, L-U-K-E, Love UK Evangelism. You can remember that.

Pray for Love Europe. It's too late to go this summer, but it's not too late to pray. Prayer is where the action is.

We see that in the life of Paul. We see that throughout the entire book of Acts. And I believe that many of our problems in the present day, and we have a lot of them on the mission field, including the fact that many, many British missionaries cannot get financial support.

Many of them are praying and thinking about returning to secular occupation to make money to support others who can stay. General missionary giving in Britain is a proven fact to be mainly tokenism. There are a few beautiful exceptions.

You may be one of them, praise the Lord. But in general, it's just so discouraging. Now, I know as Christians we're never supposed to be discouraged, right? Well, I'll tell you, you're looking at a Christian who gets discouraged all the time.

All the time, forgive me. Just looking in the mirror at times for me is a real downer. But I've discovered what to do when I get discouraged.

I repent. And I ask the Lord to forgive me. And I meditate on Scripture.

And I praise the Lord. If that doesn't work, because listening to myself is also a bit of a downer, then I put on a praise tape with my little Walkman, the greatest invention since the printing press, and I fight my way out of that depression and that discouragement. I wonder, does any of us this morning, if we're honest, that's not so easy, is it? We're discouraged.

Maybe in our prayer life. Maybe in our witnessing. Maybe in the home.

Maybe in our job. Do all of you have those exciting, mega-motivating jobs? And you just love to trundle down to Sidcup Station on Monday morning and sit with all the commuters, that smiling, happy crowd, and go in to London and work at the same desk you've been sitting at for six years. I think I'd rather be a rugby player in America.

Life is filled with sadness. Actually, Billy Graham said that. The sooner we have a balanced view of life, so that we can incorporate the joy as well as the sadness, and in the midst of the sadness not get discouraged, not throw in the towel, not get down so that we spread that sadness and that discouragement to others.

Some are very gifted in that area. You really feel great until you meet these people. And then they start telling you about all their illnesses and about all their problems and about this thing.

You go out of there and you do need a praise tape after visiting with them. It's exciting to see what God is doing in these days. No wonder Satan is angry.

No wonder Satan is trying to divide every church in Britain. There is hardly a church in Britain right now. And I'll give you a hundred books if you can prove me otherwise.

That is not battling Satan's effort to bring division. Cathedral, House Church, Baptist Church, Brethren Assembly, Pentecostal, Elam. I flow and have the privilege of moving with them, meeting sometimes these people in the thousands and ministering at places like Spring Harvest or Keswick.

Satan is out to destroy the church. Satan is out to bring disunity. Often it's small, very small, so we don't worry about it.

It's under the carpet. So we drop our guard. Whereas if we're biblical and if we're wise concerning Satan's methodology, we will constantly work toward greater unity.

We will not allow wrong attitudes to develop toward a brother, toward a sister. We will not listen to bits of gossip that stain our mind in our thinking about a person. But we will in love and tenderness go and fellowship with that person.

Not in an accusation way, but asking questions. Too often we accuse one another, especially behind one another's back. It's not easy to find a new pastor.

You're looking for, we say in America, a senior pastor. Is that what's happening now? Do you have a committee? What's happening here to find a senior pastor? Are you the senior pastor? What's happening? You're looking for a pastor. That's not easy.

The whole church is split in two looking for a pastor. And they bring one in and 40% of the people think, that's the man. But 60% think, he's not the man.

What do you think happens then? Our love for one another just increases, especially in the committee meetings. Is the church not far from here going through awesome trauma right now in this very same thing? These are days when Satan has a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. Ephesians 6 speaks about flaming fiery arrows.

Now if you went home this morning to your home and there was a little note on the door signed by 25 of your neighbors and they said, we are not going to eat today until you are dead. I dare to say that some of you most flamatically back English people would have a bit of a metabolistic upsurge reading that note. And yet this is what the Bible teaches.

And we cannot continue to play religious games in our churches. We must get down to prayer. We must get down to repentance.

We must get into the scriptures. We must guard and protect our unity. I sensed coming here this morning a sense of expectation in this church, a sense of love, a sense of unity.

And may you value that. May you fight for it spiritually. May you continue to hold high that shield of faith to stop every fiery dart of Satan.

And as you do, God will mightily use you in Sidcup and London and Britain and the world. But the road will not be easy. We are all so different.

Imagine if I joined your church, huh? It's great having me for a Sunday, huh? What if I come back on Tuesday and say, Hey, I just thought your people were the greatest crowd around. I think I'll join. You'd have an immediate meeting of the deacons.

Where do you live? West Wickham. We don't really accept people from West Wickham. That's pretty far away.

I dare to say that you might have some people in your midst who you personally also find at times a bit difficult. That's the great challenge of the Christian life. To love the person who disagrees with you.

To love the person who's very different from you. To love the person who maybe has hurt you or criticized you or misunderstood you. That's what Christianity is all about.

To receive a young, on fire, baby Christian who grows like a beautiful spiritual flower and becomes a leader in the church, that's no great challenge. He'll be a blessing. But to receive some young, struggling, baby Christian who doesn't get his act together for a couple of years, that will test your Christianity right to the root.

Doesn't mean we don't need wisdom. Doesn't mean, as Christians, we can't be conned by a false believer. In working with the Muslims and in the Muslim world, one of our greatest problems is false believers.

And we've had little naive OM leaders taken, I don't know if you know that expression, I love to use strange expressions, taken to the cleaners, we say in New Jersey, where I'm from. Deceived, conned. A young man was witnessing once in the streets of Brussels and another man came up to him and was really interested in the message.

Oh, come back to my apartment and tell me more. And this naive OMer goes back to the apartment and this man, an active, practicing homosexual, tries to seduce him on the spot. We need wisdom.

We need discipline. In some things that come our way, there's no easy answer. Some people think there's always a solution to everything.

Whenever it comes our way, there's a solution. And the pastor is supposed to know what the solution is. No wonder more of them are having nervous breakdowns than ever before.

Number one nervous breakdown group in America, next to psychiatrists or pastors. There are some things you will face as a church in which whatever you do, someone will not be happy. In which whatever you do, something will go wrong.

And the problem isn't the church. The problem is the planet. The Swedes are offering trips to the moon in 1994.

Sign up. But as long as you stay here, there'll be problems, there'll be pains, there'll be hurts. And how sad when Satan deceives a young believer and he thinks that the problem is the church, the problem is God's people, when that's not the problem.

The problem is the planet. The problem may be himself. The problem is we live in a fallen world.

The problem is this treasure is in earthen vessels. All of our life we will make mistakes. All of our life we will do dumb things and sometimes hurt people, even the ones we love the most.

Some of you are blaming yourself for problems you have with your children when the problem isn't you. It's the devil. It's the devil.

It's life. And I find personally life is a great mystery. The suffering in China right now is a mystery to me.

I refuse to accept somebody's little cliché, especially when they don't know much about China. The problem of two people being prayed for, one being healed and the other dying in a week, is not something that I accept any simple answers to. Eugenia Price helped me when I was almost abandoning a Christian faith loaded with doubt.

In her amazing book, *No Easy Answer*, and to some of these hard questions, why does God allow this? Why didn't God do that? To some of these tough questions, maybe a tough question you are wrestling with in your heart and your mind, there is no simple answer. There is only God Himself, loving you, fellowshiping with you, putting His arms spiritually around you, and asking you to come and worship Him, not in the absence of struggle or doubt, but in the midst of those things. And you will get to know Him, even if you are a doubting Thomas.

This generation of new believers are going to be strugglers. They are loaded with doubt. They are loaded with question.

They are loaded with unbelief. They will easily swing the pendulum one month, and swing the opposite direction the next, and as a Christian leader you will be scratching your head, wondering, what should I do? Let's teach them about the greatness of God. Let's be delivered from small-mindedness, even if it comes with a theological suit coat.

Let's teach them about the greatness of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, the patience of God, who will often endure that young babe's struggles and problems much more than we are able to. And when we present this kind of God, and also teach them about Satan's fiery darts, I believe we can create in God's purposes a generation of young, excited, new Christians who will turn the world upside down for Jesus Christ, even as we read in Acts 17. In the midst of this great mission, London, with millions of people praying, millions are praying right now for this, let's search our own hearts.

Let's make sure that we are on course in our own lives in finding the balance, in finding God's perspective, in learning to live with ourselves, in learning to live with others, and in building the church in a way that will be pleasing to God, and realizing that each individual here this morning is as important in the kingdom as Billy Graham. Do you believe that? I tell you, when you do, Sidcup is going to feel it, and Bromley as well. Let's pray.

Let's take a few moments for just silent contemplation, meditation. Scripture that may be on your mind, one of many that I've quoted, one that especially helps me is Romans 12, 1 and 2, I beseech you

therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Just pray your own prayer, confession, repentance, recommitment, worship.

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