It was back in 2000 when I spoke at a local convention for the last time. Interestingly enough, it was also the last time this specific Christian leadership and Sunday school convention was held. I had lectured there a number of times since moving up to Roseville. As both a pastor and counselor, I was requested to speak on issues of marriage, sexual abuse, parenting and other such subjects from a pastoral perspective.

This time this situation was different. The keynote speaker was a well-known author who specialized in the subject of spiritual warfare. The problem for me was that not only was his teaching non-biblical, it was also highly dangerous. I can’t speak to the question of his spiritual condition, but his lack of a biblical perspective on spiritual warfare was obvious.

I was very concerned and talked to my contact at the convention. I pointed out the problem with this individual. But it was too late to do anything about his attendance as the publicity had already been sent. So I said the only way I’d speak was if I could do a couple of sessions on the dangers of this keynote speaker’s approach to the subject. And surprisingly enough, as long as I didn’t directly “attack” him, the powers that be had no problem with my presenting an alternate, or from my position, a biblical view of spiritual warfare, which I did.

The keynote speaker was Neil Anderson, author of the book The Bondage Breakers, which would have been better titled, “The Bondage Makers.” And in his world view, much of our struggles are because of the activities of demons which are a threat even to Christians. Powlison gives an example of just how far out of hand this kind of thinking can become.

“SOME PEOPLE REALLY DO SEE A DEMON behind every bush. Cynthia, a woman I counseled, once cast out demons from her toaster when it failed to work. More seriously, she and her husband Andrew had a remarkable—and remarkably destructive—way of arguing with each other. For the first five minutes they warmed up with normal person-to-person bickering. But at a certain point, when the fighting turned nasty, they shifted gears and wheeled
in heavier artillery. They would bind, rebuke, and attempt to cast out de-
mons of anger, pride, and self-righteousness from each other.

In Cynthia’s words,

I saw the demon looking out of his eyes, glittering and murderous. So I
said, “Demon of anger, I bind your power in Jesus’ name!” then I claimed
the power of Jesus’ blood as my cover from all demonic assault coming
through my husband.”

1 Introduction – Part 1
A. The Subject
B. The Problem
C. The Errors and Dangers

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world,
but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15 ESV).

Introduction: In the “Lord’s Prayer” one of the things Jesus asked of the Father
was that He protect His followers from the evil one. This is Satan. And so how
does the Father do so? This is what we will be considering over the coming weeks
as we move into Ephesians and study the “Whole Armor of God.”

It is in this section of Ephesians that Paul speaks to the same subject we considered
last week. We spoke of the requirement to live out the unity we already have in
Christ. We saw how this can be a lot harder than we might like. How are we to do
so? By being …

“… filled with the Spirit. Be kind and compassionate to one another, for-
giving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 5:18, 4:32).

This means our unity is to be lived out in the relationships discussed in Ephesians
5, those of husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employ-
ees and, as we saw last time, believers within the local church and churches within
the community. In principle, all of the positive expectations for these relationships
sound great. And to the degree the people involved are believers, the expectations
can be met to some degree. Of course even for believers we can only be who God
calls us to be in dependency on Him and when filled with the Holy Spirit.

But, you might say, “It’s impossible when my husband, wife, parent, child, employer, employee aren’t believers.” And of course this isn’t true, because it’s no different, since in each and every one of these situations it is in obedience to Christ that we can be who we are called to be. “Sure,” you might say, “that sounds easy, but we live in a fallen world.”

And it is in that context and in response to that struggle that this section of Ephesians speaks to, because our battle is a spiritual one. It is this battle we will address over the next weeks as we look at Chapter 6, Verses 12-20 of Ephesians.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Subject: What we all know, at least theologically speaking, is that we are fighting a spiritual battle. The problem with those into deliverance ministry is that there is a disconnect between a biblical world view and a view that focuses on the demonic and all the mythology that has been encompassed with that perspective.

On the other hand, many of us, while acknowledging there is a battle going on, are so grounded in the material world that this battle lacks any reality. This is unacceptable if we are going to live as we are called to by God.

The real question is: what does it mean to fight the good fight? And it is here in Ephesians that Paul answers that question. So here’s how I mean to approach the discussion. This morning I will touch on the faulty thinking of the deliverance approach, just to get it out of the way. Much of this will be adapted from my conference presentation.

Next we’ll have an overview of the biblical perspective. Then, in the weeks to come, I want to spend one session on each of the pieces of armor as Paul describes them in Ephesians.

The Problem: …is the church gets caught up in the demonic “the devil made me do it” approach to spiritual warfare, which leaves us without responsibility for our actions. It also sees a conspiracy that isn’t found by scripture. Hank Hanegraaff in his work The Covering, takes us back to one of those times where the latest fad in the church was a demonic conspiracy.
Imagine traveling back in time to the late 1970s. As you are sitting in church on Sunday morning, your pastor announces that next week the church will be hosting a special conference with a former Satanist who has been miraculously transformed by the power of the gospel.

The next weekend arrives. ... John Todd is introduced as a former Satanist, a courier for the satanic ruling council, the Illuminati. He is now a brother in Christ, free from the shackles of satanic power.

Todd opens his message with a bang. According to him, few people have any idea how powerful and pervasive Satanism really is. Movies such as “The Exorcist” and “Rosemary’s Baby” are just the tip of a very insidious iceberg. The real danger, he thinks, lies in a carefully crafted cartel encompassing policemen, politicians, and even pastors who are secretly engaged in subterfuge to advance their satanic agenda.

... you hear Todd insinuate that Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, is a secret Satanist. He has been strategically situated by Satan to seduce young people by imprisoning their minds with secular tunes to deceptively innocuous lyrics masking subliminal satanic messages. ...

Jump forward ... to the present. John Todd no longer preaches. He has lost his popularity in a plunge from pulpit to prison—a convicted felon, an exposed deceiver.”

The Errors: I am not interested in pointing out errors of extreme positions because, hopefully, we are more likely to come in contact with the more conservative end of the spectrum.

One major problem then is an inconsistent and illogical approach to the use of scripture. Powlison identifies two factors involved with the poor handling of scripture. He describes them as: “Fragmentation” and “Flattening.” He defines them as follows:

“Fragmentation occurs when context is lost. ... Contexts are significant: Scripture is composed of passages within books within an Old and a New Covenant. ... God’s speaking embeds particular comments and incidents within larger interpretive themes. ...

“The second problem—flattening—occurs when the distinctives of the particular passage are lost. What a passage means to teach us becomes obscured; some lowest common denominator blinds us to its details. ... Flattening can

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also occur when something is imported from outside the Bible. For example, many (deliverance) books teach that the human heart can become a haunted house of demons inherited from sinful ancestors, which is not what the Bible itself says about the human heart. The notion of ancestral spirits is a bit of occult theology read into the Bible, not out of it.”

Another example of this poor use of scripture is a passage that is frequently used as a “proof text” for transgenerational demon possession. The passage of course is Exodus 20:5.

“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me …”

The problem here is that nothing is being said about demons here or anywhere in scripture regarding transgenerational demons. In fact the principle here would seem to be best understood as saying that if there has not been repentance by the third or fourth generation, sin is so ingrained that destruction is inevitable. This truth can be observed throughout the books of Joshua and Judges. So a teaching of transgenerational demon involvement leads to bondage where none actually exists.

Here’s one more misuse of scripture. It’s found in the account of Job. One approach of deliverance ministry to spiritual warfare is the problem of not taking total victory, which we are entitled to, over demons and by inference Satan. Job is often used as an example. The problem here of course is God was totally in control of the situation and actually allowed Satan limited access to Job, which is conveniently overlooked. God was concerned about Job’s spiritual well-being and allowed him to grow and learn a lesson from Satan’s activities.

Keep in mind that Satan is seen as being the cause of sin and therefore moral evil in the lives of believers. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” is often presented as support for the involvement of Satan acting destructively in the life of believers. Powlison has something interesting to say about this misuse of scripture.

“Many argue that Paul’s “thorn in [the] flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment” him, provides a case for ongoing demon-induced suffering (2 Corinthians 12:7). This thorn was possibly a physical affliction—perhaps the

3 Ibid., p. 44-46.
problem Paul alluded to in Galatians 4:13-15. ... Satan’s messengers are particularly associated with physical sufferings. Notice how the affliction bears no relation to moral evil, but is actually used by God to protect Paul from moral evil. In speaking of Satan’s messenger, the passage sounds the notes of suffering, weakness, mistreatment, distress, and difficulty—not sin.”

Another major problem in the deliverance approach to spiritual warfare is a lack of recognition of the seriousness of the fallen nature. It correctly recognizes that in any given situation, in dependency on God we can choose not to sin. But, because we still carry the old nature, along with our new, there will be many times we chose to sin. We are in rebellion and this isn’t the product of demons, though it is certainly encouraged by them. Consider the following passages:

“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5).

“Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults” (Psalm 19:12).

“This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead” (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Ephesians 4:17-25).

4 Ibid., p. 108.
Note in all these passages the focus is on our fallen nature. If we are going to help others, and for that matter ourselves, we need to understand the real issue is not demons without or within. It is the struggle with our own sinful heart.

With the emphasis on demons, we fall into one of Satan’s traps: giving him too much power. Instead of focusing on God and our safety, of which I will say more in the next hour, there is a tendency to live in a dark and fearful world. Elliot Miller defines the problem this way:

“Included among the problems with (a noted deliverance author’s) spiritual warfare teachings are his overstatement of the devil’s authority, including his assertion that Satan has dominion over the earth and its creatures; his overstatement of the devil’s role in the believer’s life, including his claim that gaining victory over the devil requires learning how to verbally address and “bind” him.”

We’ve already note with both Job and Paul that Satan has no power, even as prince of this world, but only what God allows. God is in control and additionally, God loves us and He doesn’t make mistakes, which should be the source of our comfort, not some “magic” like power over Satan.

Of course one of the most obvious problems is no matter how much truth one presents, people respond by saying “I experienced …” Personal experience becomes the basis for evaluation truth, not scripture. Antidotal statements, a major support for deliverance theory, override the teachings of scripture. “New revelation” overrides the truth of scripture. But, the Word is to be the basis for testing all truths. It doesn’t matter what I say. It doesn’t matter what the deliverance teachers say. What matters I, how does what we say match up with what God says?

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

The Dangers of Deliverance: Whenever one uses systems instead of God’s TRUTH it makes the struggle of walking in obedience even a greater struggle than it need be. This should be self evident. After a, this is what the Jesus said.

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“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32).

Elliot Miller, quoting from one of the more conservative of the deliverance teachers, gives an example how, within the counseling setting, one can hinder instead of help the client when using a faulty understanding of scripture.

“[A woman named Anne wrote (to the quoted author) in the middle of one of his conferences:] ‘I didn’t know what it meant to take every thought captive. I tried to do this once, but I was unsuccessful because I blamed myself for all this stuff. I thought all those thoughts were mine and that I was the one who was doing it. There has always been a terrible cloud hanging over my head because of these issues. I never could accept the fact that I was really righteous because I didn’t feel like it. Praise God it was on Satan—not me. I have worth.’”

Miller responds to this letter by noting:

“There is a biblical basis for saying some of our evil thoughts are provoked by Satan (e.g., 1 Chron. 21:1; Matt. 16:23; John 13:2; Acts 5:3), but there is no biblical basis for saying all of them do (James 1:14, 4:1; Rom 8:7; 1 Pet. 2:11; Gal. 5:17). The author fails to recognize that evil can originate from ourselves (our flesh) and yet we can still gain victory over the power and guilt of sin through Christ’s cross and indwelling Spirit (e.g., Heb. 9:13-14; Gal. 5:16-25). His desire to protect us from responsibility for the evil in our hearts contradicts his own emphasis that we should take responsibility and not fall into a “devil made me do it” mentality.”

One last danger which I hope is rare but is extremely disturbing is the potential damage done to children by this approach to the Christian life. First, the emphasis on demons instead of our security in Christ can create a great deal of fear, which is never productive. But there is an even greater danger in the more extreme end of the movement. K. D. Kragen notes:

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7 Ibid.
“Deliverance also poses a real danger to children, particularly where parents attribute their child’s problem-behavior to demons. Such beliefs can result in misdirected blame and the breakdown of communication between a child and parent or counselor, especially when it is believed that it is a demon or demons speaking and in control of the child. For an horrendous example of this kind of problem, see “Spirits of Arrested Development,” Rudy LeBlanc, The Dove, Spring 1988, vol.1.X, pp. 19-22. LeBlanc writes, “The function of this demon is to arrest development in a young person, always bringing them back to age 13 and younger. [The demon] claims to have authority over homosexual sprits,... over spirits influencing a girl to be a tomboy to please her father, the demon will still up the desire through the sprits passed on by ancestral curses;... he is also called the chronic prince of arrested development,... claims to be sent by satan personally, has a prince and a deputy who lives in the mind of the person to make sure that they do not advance past age 13.... Those that collect dolls and stuffed animals as grown-ups are arrested in their development. They do childish things such as playing with toys on their desks when at work” (p.20).”

I have ended this session with an extreme example. But we must understand, as we move away from a sound understanding of scripture, there is no limit to how far from truth we can move. And, when we are talking about the client in a counseling setting, they come because of a struggle with truth and reality. In the more extreme situation, there is no telling how far off base they can get. Our job is to move them towards truth, not farther away from it.

We do fight against Satan and his kingdom. Spiritual warfare is the reality of the Christian life. But, if we are to have victory then we must fight the battle following God’s rules, not the vain imagining of men’s minds. Next week we will have an overview of the biblical approach to Spiritual Warfare and Paul’s teaching found here in Ephesians 6.

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The Gospel of John
A Miniseries
Putting on Your Armor ~ Part 1

Ephesians 6:12-20

I Introduction – Part 1
A. The Subject
B. The Problem
C. The Errors and Dangers

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” ESV).

Introduction:
(John 17:15; Ephesians 5:18, 4:32, 6:12)

The Subject:

The Problem:
The Errors:
(Exodus 20:5; Genesis 6:5; Psalm 19:12; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Ephesians 4:17-25; Acts 17:11)

The Dangers of Deliverance:
(John 8:31-32)

Personal Application: Consider where we might unintentionally be misusing scripture ourselves because of what we may have once been taught rather than what it says.

Prayer for the Week: Lord may Your Spirit give me discernment in the understanding of Your Word. In Jesus name, amen.