

KNOW YOUR BATTLEFIELDS & YOUR ENEMIES

Power Struggle Series - Part 8

Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. Are you a little surprised to see me? I was here last week and I am back again this week. I know Pastor Ben was supposed to preach this week, so I am a little surprised to be here myself. But let me tell you what has been going on in his life. This week we were in a meeting on Wednesday and he started getting a couple of texts. The texts were from Cedarville University where his son, Jaden, is a freshman, and they said they had his son in the clinic before going to the ER because they think he may have Covid. So Pastor Ben jumped in his car and got there on Thursday, and they confirmed that Jaden indeed had Covid.

So Ben brought him back home, and he is with Jaden in an RV outside of his house for two weeks. And Pastor Ben said he had no fear of the Covid, but he does have fear of being in an RV with his son for two weeks. (*Laughter.*) So we will see how that goes. No, Jaden is a great guy, and he was just getting all plugged in at college. If you know Jaden you know he is Mr. Social, so he is going to go nuts being two weeks in an RV. But he is doing much better after having a couple of rough days at the beginning. They have a good treatment plan going for him and he is doing well. Pastor Ben sends his greetings. He watched the first service this morning, and he wishes he could be here obviously.

This morning we are going to continue our series on Power Struggle. By the way we have several visitors this morning and we had several in the last service as well. We had some folks who have just moved here from Key West, and we found out we have some mutual friends. So if you are a guest today I hope you will come by and introduce yourself to me before you leave as I would love to meet you.

So we are getting toward the end of a series on spiritual warfare. Certainly 2020 has been one of those years where it just feels like everywhere we turn it has been a challenge. I have to tell you I would like to take a mulligan on this year and do it over. But in the midst of it we know that Satan is alive and well, and we also know that God is alive and well. And for those of us who are followers of Christ we want to make sure that we are engaged in the battle of spiritual warfare from a proper position.

So we have been studying that all the way through, and this morning we are going to be in II Timothy Chapter 2. We will get to that in just a moment, but it was about a year ago next month actually that my youngest son moved out of my house for the final time. A couple of months before that he had announced that he was going to be a US Marine. Now he is one of those kids by the way who basically came out of the womb to be a soldier. I bought him his first Dollar Store little green men that we have all seen forever and he played with those all the time. If he didn't have those he made his own out of cards and Q-tips and everything else he could think of. He was always plotting battles.

I don't come from a military background, nor does my wife's family so we were kind of like, '*I don't know about this.*' You know we always have these dreams for our

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kids of going to college, or whatever. But finally at the age of twenty-two he said, *'I have to do this. If I don't go in the Marines I know I am going to regret it for the rest of my life.'* Well, he is twenty-two years old, and he gets to make those kind of calls so off he went. He left for Parris Island a year ago this coming month and it was one of the last classes to graduate from Parris Island before Covid hit. He went through all the nasty training during which we didn't get to hear from him to know if he was dead or alive or anything that was going on. Then they had the Crucible which is a huge demanding physical test and then we finally got to hear from him for the first time.

We went down for the graduation, and it was a proud day obviously for mom and dad. Then he came home for just a few days of break, and now he has been gone ever since and because of Covid they are not allowed to have leave. So we miss him a great deal but thank the Lord we live in the day of Facetime and email and text messaging so we are able to keep in touch.

He has had a break for a while where they weren't doing any training but now he is back into some pretty serious training. So he is talking to me like I know what he is talking about. Do your kids ever do that to you? Like, *'You are supposed to know this stuff, dad.'* *'You know I'm MOS.'* And I am like, *'What in the world is an MOS?'* All you military guys are laughing at me because I don't know this. But apparently as you go into the service you take some tests and you are assigned to something, and MOS means Military Occupational Specialties and a number. And this determines what you are going to be, whether you are going to be infantry or logistics or whatever. And I have now executed all the different terms of the military I know with those two words.

But it means all the different things that you can be in the military. So he had watched the first service, and I don't know if he is watching this service or not, but I said this in the first service, *'He is an idiot.'* He wanted to be one of those guys that kicks in the doors, you know, the guy with the gun on the front end. And I just don't know how he grew up this way, but that is what he wanted to do. Well, he told me that his MOS was not going to let him do that. And I am thinking, *'Yes!'* But then he said, *'Instead I am being trained in taking out tanks.'*

And I am like, *'What does that mean?'* So he sends me a picture of himself with a Javelin missile, which is a seventy-five pound missile you carry on your back and you launch from your shoulder. And then he sends me some links to YouTube where it shows them taking out tanks from a mile away. This is my little boy and he has this seventy-five pound missile on his back. But he is having the time of his life. He is excited about this. And man, when he starts talking to me about these things he is absolutely enthralled with it, and I realize that he is a product of the training in which he has been engaged for basically the last year.

There is one thing that we know about the US military and that is the US military is serious about fighting wars and winning wars. If we have to go to war they want to

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know who their enemies are, what the battlefields are like, and they have every intention of using all the military force, power, authority and might of their government to be able to win that war. They are serious about it.

And the fact is I don't know much about the military and whether you are a soldier or a sailor or a marine. I don't know a lot about the Air Force, the Navy, the Army, the Marines, the National Guard or even the Space Force. I just thought they picked up a gun and learned how to shoot people. But no, it is far more complex than that. It is far more complex. There are people on the ground that study the different areas. They train in Hawaii for mountains and humidity. They train near the Arctic so they can get used to the cold weather, the snow and the terrain of the mountains. They train in Twentynine Palms out in the desert for that area. They train in the swamps of south Georgia and eastern North Carolina so they can get used to those terrains.

They train in every kind of weapon you could possibly imagine. They go for hours and hours and hours without sleep. They have spies that are trying to find out where their troops are located and what weapons they have. They have technicians that can do everything from fly drones to find out where the troops are, to being able to get inside their computer systems and steal their secrets. The idea of warfare today is very complex.

So if you think that on a man-sized scale warfare is sophisticated and complex and filled with specialties, can you imagine how much more sophisticated the greatest war that has ever been waged in the history of time is in terms of spiritual warfare? Everything is at stake with this, and the God of the universe and the chief rebel are going at each other and have been for thousands of years. So for us to look at spiritual warfare with a kind of a, '*yeah, yeah, yeah, I understand that,*' attitude and being not prepared for it, being not trained for it, being not thinking about it, means we leave ourselves foolish and vulnerable because this is real stuff.

Now we talk about it but we only talk about it in a theoretical sense and this is real serious stuff and we need to be aware of it. And from the days of the Apostle Paul and the New Testament church they trained their disciples to be ready for opposition, to be ready for difficulty, to endure hardness, to persevere, to always be on the watch, to be careful, and to be vigilant. All of these were in place as part of the disciples' training because they knew the stakes were high and the enemy was relentless. And we need to be prepared as well.

So as we kind of culminate this series, as we kind of close it out, I want us to look beginning at a passage this morning in II Timothy where Paul is talking to his protégé Timothy. Remember Paul had kind of two sons in the ministry, two boys in which he really poured himself into. And least they were the ones we know that he recorded in Scripture. There were two letters written to Timothy and one written to Titus, filled with

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practical information. And as Paul is speaking to his son Timothy in the ministry he is giving him some sound advice.

And as we close out this series I want to kind of build a dome of understanding on all the different aspects. We talked about suffering, we talked about spiritual warfare, we talked about weaponry, we talked about dress and we talked about a lot of different things, but let's get into our battlefields and our enemies this morning. So look with me if you will in II Timothy Chapter 2 and beginning in verse 1.

“You then, my child, be strengthened.” Now hang on just a moment because I want you to understand this. First of all Paul knew he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul was talking to people that he really loved. He was talking to this boy, Timothy, this guy that he had brought to Christ and disciplined, empowered, equipped and trained to be a pastor. He refers to Timothy as ‘my child,’ or my son, my boy. And we need to understand that when God is preparing us for battle He doesn't see us as expendable soldiers, He doesn't see us as collateral units that may or may not be damaged in the process, but He sees us as His children for whom He died.

And you know when your son goes to war it changes your perspective about war. When your daughter goes into the military it changes your perspective on what she may face. And God knows that His children are those that are engaged in battle against Satan and his forces, and in the battle of time and treachery that have existed since the Fall He knows that we are His children and He loves us, and He wants the best for us. And He is protecting us.

So Paul says, ***“My child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”*** Then notice he gives them a challenge in verse 2. ***“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*** And here is an important reminder for all of us, and that is this, the greatest battle that is waged in the Christian walk is the battle for discipleship. And every soldier is called to be a disciple maker. Every one of us ought to be looking for someone who has walked apart from Christ that we can introduce through the gospel the power of Christ as salvation and help them grow in their understanding of Scripture and the maturity of their walk. Every one of us has a responsibility. No matter what you do in the Lord's army, you have a responsibility to be a disciple maker.

Now please look in verse 3: ***“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”*** I love how the King James translation put it: ***“Endure hardness.”*** There is a word here in the Greek for ‘endure or to share in suffering’ that connects to perseverance. In other words we need to ‘keep at it.’ There are going to be difficult days, there are going to be tough periods, life sometimes is an ongoing struggle. We get that. But because we are in Christ, we have hope.

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So Paul says: ***“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”*** When Josh went to the military everything he took was in a Walmart bag, and it wasn't even close to being full. They equipped him and they did not want him bringing his phone, or his Xbox or PlayStation or whatever it is the kids are playing these days, They did want him to bring anything but basically a Bible, an address book, a toothbrush and the clothes he was wearing.

Why was that? It was because they do not want their entanglements so they would be focused. And we need to be focused. The thing about many of us is as we fight this battle we allow a lot of distractions to enter our life from this world that keeps us from pressing toward that prize which is in Christ Jesus. And we have to be careful that we don't allow our thoughts and agendas and our priorities to become cluttered with things that are less than what we are called to do. So soldiers are not to get entangled in civilian pursuits.

Now look in verse 5, where we now have a sudden changing of gears. It is really important because it is going to happen twice, verse 4 to verse 5 and then again in verse 6. Some of us are old enough to remember the old record player when it screeched the needle across it. We are going to have a needle screech here. So he is talking about warfare, he is talking about fighting in battle, and then in verse 5 he says: ***“An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”***

Then there is another screech: ***“It is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”*** I want you to stop and consider this; Paul is wanting Timothy to understand this, as well as all those who would read it eventually, that whatever your background is there is a battle to be won. So he uses the soldier analogy, and that is an important one, because we understand the stakes for that are life and death. But then he says in case you can't relate to that, here is another analogy to consider - you are athletes and why do athletes run? They run to fight the race. They run to better their time. They run in order to get the laurel in those days, or the medallion or the trophy today. But you don't run a race so that you can finish in last place. You run the race so that you finish well, so that you can win, so that you can succeed and improve. And so he said here is another way of looking at this battle because when you are an athlete you often are thinking of it as a war. It may be a war from a previous time or it may be a war against an opposing school or team, but you want to win because that is where the glory is. That is where the reward is.

And then Paul goes to another analogy. He says if you don't relate to the athlete, and if you don't relate to the soldier, maybe you can relate to this, particularly because in those days the society was very agrarian, he said maybe you will relate to farming. ***“It is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.”*** I grew up in a farming community, and my family comes from a long line of farmers. I grew up on a

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farm and I am a pretend farmer today. I just grow vegetables and Succulents and weird stuff in my backyard, plus occasionally chickens when I can have them.

So I am not a real farmer, but I like to grow things. One thing I know whether you are growing houseplants, or you are growing crops or hogs, it doesn't matter what you are doing, the fact is that you are always at war. You are at war against disease, you are at war against pestilence, you are at war against the weather, and you are at war against drought, because you have to make sure that those things that are alive, that are going to help keep you alive eventually, are well cared for.

Paul is kind of throwing a wide net here. He is saying whether you think like a soldier, whether you think like an athlete, or whether you think like a farmer, understand that you better be serious about what you do. It matters, it is important, and you better be focused on it. You better know your field and you better know your enemies. If you are a distance runner athlete you need to train differently than if you are a sprinter athlete. If you are a shotput thrower you do it differently than if you are a hurdle runner. There are different sports with different disciplines to them, so you must know your sport and you must try to be the best in it.

If you are a dairy farmer you will be different than a beef farmer. If you are a row crop farmer you will be different than a farmer with a nursery filled with plants. There are differences, so you become experts in your own area, and you drill into it. And then you know your enemies. As an athlete your enemy is the opposing school, and the guy who always wins. It is the person who comes out of nowhere after training and all of a sudden they are a threat to your record. For farmers it may be the wind being too strong, it may be hail, it may be grasshoppers, or it may be blight that gets on the plants. It can be a variety of things, but you better know who the enemies are because you can't fight them if you are not aware of them. So Paul is using these analogies to tell us to know our battlefields and to know our enemies. And he gives us those examples.

You know the book called 'The Art of War' was written twenty-six hundred years ago by a Chinese man by the name of Sun Tzu. And I thought what he said was really, really interesting. *"If you know the enemy, and you know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not your enemy, for every victory gained, you will suffer a defeat. And if you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."*

Today in military colleges all around the world they study this guy's book because it is considered a classic textbook even though it was written so many years ago. But we have a book that is even older, and even more reliable, and that is the Word of God. And we need to be going to it to see what we should be doing to know our enemy and to know our battlefields.

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So this morning very quickly I want to kind of build this dome of understanding. The first thing I want you to look at is our battlefields. And for the sake of discussion this morning, I have reduced them to three. But I think it is three that I think we can all easily identify and of which we can be aware.

The first one is this - there is the spiritual battle. I am afraid sometimes that most of us are into concrete thinking, and by concrete I mean things that can be actively received or perceived by our five senses - feeling, smelling, touching, seeing and hearing. And because of that we sometimes almost forget about the world that is unseen. In fact our whole educational system right now is very much built on that. For many years even in the scientific and educational academic communities there was the idea that there was a world seen and a world unseen. They believed in naturalism and supernaturalism.

As science has kind of developed and become more sophisticated over the years it dismisses the supernatural and believes that everything can be explained with additional scientific study, or naturalism. Now I tell you all that to say this - as believers we understand something, all of nature, all of creation, screams there is something bigger than this. Everything that we see that is natural tells us, it announces and proclaims there is something supernatural we do not see and we do not understand that is behind it.

It is impossible to look at the intricacies of creation, of the human body, of cellular structures, of quantum physics, and everything in between, and not see that this is something more determined than coincidence or happenstance. Coincidence or happenstance cannot explain all that we see here. So what is that? It is the supernatural; it is what we cannot see and are not capable of perceiving with our five senses. Who is that? That is God. The Bible tells us no man has seen God, but we see His evidence everywhere we look, and we see His design the more we study the natural world.

So what is the battle you and I are fighting then that is not natural? We are not talking about taking up swords and spears and guns and bombs to win this battle, or we shouldn't be, because this is primarily a spiritual battle. And the spiritual battle is one that is more difficult to understand and more difficult to explain, but it is there nonetheless. The Bible says we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, and then it goes on and describes a litany of spiritual beings that we do struggle against. For us to fail to appreciate the fact that our battle is spiritual will damage and limit our ability to be victorious in the way we live out our faith. We need to understand that there are things going on that we don't know about.

It was real interesting recently when I was part of an activist group on a pro-life matter. And the group was doing a very quiet prayer walk, but there were opponents there that were very loud, very angry, very profane and very vile. I can't describe some of the things that they said in a room with mixed company appropriately, but it was horrible. There was one of our church teenage boys there and as we were leaving he came up to me and said, *'You know this is going to really sound strange to you Pastor*

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Dan, but I could almost feel something spiritually dark going on here. And I said to him, *'Absolutely, you could.'*

You see being a believer you can perceive these things. I have sensed it myself. Years ago I was in France and experienced it. I also experienced it in Cuba one time when I was staying in a home where there was a Santeria altar. There was a little bowl of rice, a bottle of Cuban rum, and some flowers placed on what was like an altar. And it was right outside my door of the room where I was staying which was like at a bed and breakfast place. The government would monitor where I was allowed to stay.

And when I walked in there I saw this altar first and right above it was a picture of the Virgin Mary. So it was kind of confusing. But I felt and sensed darkness there. I really can't describe it other than saying it felt spiritual. I literally went to my room and felt unrest and uneasy. So I opened my Bible and I prayed out loud and read Scripture, because I know that Satan hates the Word of God. And I did that to remind myself of the spiritual battle that goes on when I am in missions in other countries.

Sometimes in America we lose touch with this. I was in India one time and it was so spiritually dark and oppressed there that the guy I was with looked at me and asked me: *'Can you feel it?'* And when I told him that I could he said we need to go back to our rooms and pray. We literally went back to our rooms and we spent time praying for physical protection from the spiritual onslaught that was in this very dark region we were in. I say all that to say this - we fight a spiritual battle. And if we are not engaged in spiritual warfare through prayer and the Word of God, we leave ourselves vulnerable.

The second thing is the worldly battle. The worldly battle is the battle around us in this world and in the culture in this system. John talks about this a lot in I and II John. But it is the spirit of the antichrist that lives in this world. It is why in our culture today we feel opposition to the truth, and to biblical values. And we have a system that says we have to cheat to get ahead, money is the end goal, and power is everything, all of these things that we as Christ followers look at and say, *'No, no, no, no.'*

And yet when you are at work, or at school, or when you are talking to your friends, or in your community, or watching television, those messages are offensive. If you are a discerning believer when you see it, or hear it, you want to stop them and debate them. Why is this? It is because the world is set in a direction that is opposite to the way God designed it. And that tension you feel in the world today is a spiritual battle. It is why when you hear people say things, you hear people curse, you hear people glorify the murder of the unborn, you hear people who are bent toward violence, and you think, *'What in the world!'* If you are a believer that offence is part of the warfare that we are engaged in that is both spiritual and with physical ramifications of spiritual lostness because it is of this world.

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Then the third thing is the personal battle. And this to me is one of the most difficult because this is the one that takes place between my ears and between my head and my heart. It is that battle that wages and rages within us. I know what is right and I want to do what is wrong. I know what the Bible says and I know what my sin nature begs me to do. I know the truth and yet sometimes I seem bent toward the darkness. What is going on? Why am I struggling? I have been a believer for decades. I am a pastor. I spend my day in the Word of God and with believers. Why do I struggle still? Paul asked those questions. Peter struggled with it. The apostles did also. Why? It is because there is personal battle as well that you and I are waging.

So those three battlefields: the unseen world, God versus Satan and the angels and demons opposing each other that is all around us but we can't see it; the world in which we live; and the battle within our own hearts and souls. Those are our battlefields. We need to know them. The military used to talk about '*on land, on the sea, or in the air.*' For us it is '*all around us, the world included, and in my heart.*' That is where the battles take place.

Now very quickly let's look at the enemies we face. We are going to be going through a lot of Scripture and I will read it to you as we go along. So the first one is, remember the first enemy, the worst enemy, and the primary enemy you face is the devil himself. The Bible says this in I Peter 5:8: "***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***" We used this verse early on in this series when we talked about Satan having a plan for our defeat. Satan has a strategy to bring us down, and we cannot forget that.

Here is what has happened in our culture and in our world - we have reduced Satan to become almost a caricature. If you ask someone to draw you a picture of the devil, what are they going to do? They are going to draw a picture of a little guy in a red suit holding a pitchfork. He will also have two little horns on his head and a tail with a point on it. We have reduced the greatest enemy of God to a buffoonish cartoon character that walks around and pokes people in the behind from time to time. That is not Satan. Satan is far smarter, far more seductive, far more tricky, far more appealing and far more powerful than we can ever imagine. And he is real. When we reduce him, we make ourselves vulnerable.

Archibald Brown said this: "*The existence of the devil is so clearly taught in the Bible that to doubt it is to doubt the Bible itself.*" We must take Satan seriously; Scripture certainly does. In fact Satan is so powerful and so unique God doesn't even choose to use one name to describe him. We call him Satan kind of in a general term, but in Scripture beyond Satan, he is known as Lucifer, deceiver, belial, liar, tempter, accuser, dragon, devil, adversary, Beelzebub, evil one, murderer, prince of this world, serpent and angel of light.

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Those are all words used in Scripture to describe him because not one word can adequately describe the diabolical and multifacetedness of his nature. If he is walking around seeking whom he may devour we need to be watching around, watching for him who is coming to devour us. And so we need to be serious about the issue of Satan. Satan has a plan for our defeat. He is enemy Number One.

Secondly, we have to understand that the world around us is also at enmity with us and at enmity with God. I want to say this and I will read a Scripture in just a moment, but here is a challenge I really would appreciate if you would consider and receive. If you feel comfortable in this world, in this culture, in this generation, even in this country, then I would challenge you to ask yourself why. And that is because to feel comfortable in this world is not the natural state of the person who has given his heart and life to Christ. We are aliens is what the Scripture calls us. We are outcasts. We are the enemy of the prince of this world. And if that is the case, then we should not feel comfortable.

Have you ever been invited to something where you just didn't fit in? One time I ended up at a party that when I walked in I am like, *'Why would someone think I would want to be at this party?'* And that is an important question to ask if you find yourself in that situation. You might want to ask, *'How in the world did I get this invitation because they should know that this is not a place where I am going to fit in?'*

As soon as I got to this party I mean I knew I was somewhere I should not be, that ultimately I was going to either create stress for them, or I was going to capitulate my own self, but it wasn't going to be a good fit. It wasn't going to be somewhere I needed to be, so I left. I left right away. I just knew this was not going to be good for me, and if I stayed either I was going to compromise, or I was going to be a point of contention. And I didn't want either of those things to happen.

So you have to ask yourself if you feel comfortable in this world, if you think this is really it, if you are just fitting in and blending in, and feeling quite comfortable with it, then why is that? And it may be a reason to explore your heart, your relationship with Christ, and your testimony. Sometimes to feel comfortable is to be careless.

Paul wrote that the creation groans under the weight of its own damnation. Our creation literally groans under the weight of its own damnation. Whether you are talking about wildfires, or earthquakes, or civil unrest, all of creation, everywhere you turn you see the groaning, and the pain. And it is collapsing. It is ageing; even science tells us that. It is like a law of thermodynamics. It is deteriorating. It is broken. It was marred by Satan himself at the fall.

But here is something to remember - this is not all there is. The best is yet ahead of us, not behind us, not around us, but yet to come. And right now what we are engaged in is the war. It is the messy part. It is the difficult period. But it is not going to stay this

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way. What does Scripture tell us? Scripture tells us there is going to be a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem. We know the future, all we have to do is study. But at the onset of our lives and our existence we were born into a world that was broken and marred. It is not a place where we should feel comfortable. Actually it is a place where we should feel concerned. It is a place where we should be looking for hope and escape and reason and meaning and what the future holds. So the world around us is a battlefield and it is an enemy as well.

Let me read this Scripture we find in Matthew because I think it gives us great promise and great hope. Matthew Chapter 10 and verses 18 through 20 says this: “***And you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake.***” Jesus is speaking to His disciples. “***To bear witness before them and the Gentiles*** (or the non-believers). ***When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.***”

Now here is the reality. In the world today if you live like Christ it is going to create contention. And there will be times when that impacts you personally. I had lunch with someone this week who has always been just an amazing inspiration and mentor at some level to me as well. He was talking about how he got called in to HR over something as simple as praying. He wasn't pushing his faith; he was simply living his faith. And ultimately it created hostility and anger and an excuse for someone to exploit. But in the midst of that God gave him peace, the words to say so that he didn't act in the flesh, and even though in that circumstance, that situation ended up poorly for him, in the middle of it God is bringing something new and good out of it. And more importantly, whoever was in contact with that scenario knows what it looks like to be a person committed to Christ.

And to the day they die they are going to know that they have had at least one time modeled before them the integrity of a Christian walk that will place obedience to the Lord and the public testimony of their faith in Him above material gain, or comfort, or position, or status, or opportunity. And that is an important testimony and an important legacy, more important than ever than how much money we will ever earn, or how many letters we have behind our name, or which office we get to occupy. Why is that? It is because we don't belong here.

The third thing is this - the flesh which is upon us. Galatians Chapter 5 and verses 19 through 21 deal with this. Each of us possess within us through our fallen nature the seeds of our own destruction. We need to wake up and remember the war in which we have to engage this day to avoid catastrophe, and that is the war that is against our own sin nature. Here is what the Scripture says in Galatians Chapter 5: “***Now the works of the flesh are evident:*** (another word for evident would be obvious, and then he gives a list) ***sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like***

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these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Now what is happening in this passage? And again it is important to note that here is Paul writing to a young church. Does this mean that none of us are ever going to fall victim to one of these sins? We are going to do that because we still have a sin nature. That is why we have a war. In a war you win some battles and you lose some battles, and even in the battles that you win there are a few casualties and a few wounds that happen. But the different is whether or not this is our life, or this is an aberration.

So whenever you are committed to Christ these are problematic, these are issues. You should feel conviction when these things rise up in your heart. And in those times when you make the mistake and you commit the sin, there ought to be remorse and grief. And the absence of feeling conviction ought to be a clarion warning sign to us that the Holy Spirit is not in us to do what the Holy Spirit is supposed to do which is to call us to repentance and conviction.

If this is your life and you feel no conviction, if this is your life and you feel no tension, if you can walk out the door of a church and put on piety, and live duplicitously in the church setting then this needs to be a wakeup call to us that we may not be in the right branch of the military. We may not even be on the right side. And we need to focus on that. If we can wake up each day, live out the works of the flesh duplicitously claiming godliness, but living and walking in the flesh, we need to have a difficult examination.

And I am afraid we are living in a generation of Christianity that has cheapened grace as evidenced by our fleshly, worldly, carnal values and our pragmatic rationalization, our desire to be in the world, of the world, and accepted by the world. If your goal is to be accepted by the world, first of all you have a bad goal, and secondly you need to ask yourself who your king is.

I know that this is straight talk and it may make you feel a little convicted, particularly if you have been indulging in these on a regular basis, but that is not my responsibility other than to teach the truth. But you do have a responsibility to listen to the Holy Spirit who could be convicting you. Can you imagine what could happen in this country if people who claim to be Christians actually lived like them? Can you imagine the difference we would make?

Oh, it would create some chaos and tension, and it would create some controversy I am sure, but in our culture you are more likely to see a Christian leader who is exposed to be the duplicitous fraud than you are the one who stands up consistently for righteousness. And when our country gets to that point we are in trouble. We are in trouble, and the only way to change that is to change it in our individual hearts, that we will be consistent before the Lord, and our reputation is worthy of our calling.

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The fourth thing is the emotions which are within us. Jeremiah Chapter 17 and verse 9 says: ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*** The two greatest emotions that you and I possess are what we love and what we hate. Our real love and our real hatred reveal our real heart. And you know what - you should have both. Maybe you think you shouldn't hate anything, but absolutely we should hate things. We are to hate sin; God hates sin. It was sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. So we just should hate sin. We can't be a good gardener if we don't hate weeds.

We used to shoot coyotes where I grew up. Do you know why we shot coyotes? It was because they killed our baby calves. Actually once in a while someone would shoot a dog because they would kill chickens. I know you don't want to hear that but it was just taking an enemy seriously. And there are times when you have to absolutely say, *‘This is important because I love it and I will protect it.’* And the things of God are worthy of protection. And that begins with our hearts.

It has been said that you can know much about a man's character by what makes him laugh, and what makes him cry. So we need to ask ourselves, when it comes to my heart, do I love the things of God, and do I hate the things of my enemy? Do I lean into pleasing the Lord and do I run away from the things of my enemy? The Bible says, ***“Flee youthful lusts.”*** Turn your back on Satan. Mortify, or put to death, your flesh. It is war. They use strong terms to teach people how to fight wars and we need to be serious about it as believers as well.

The next thing is the path which is behind us. I am already out of time so I am going to blitz through these last two and I apologize, but here is the reality. Many of us are allowing our past, which is dead and buried, to haunt our present. He who has no future, who is Satan, loves to rob us of our hope for tomorrow and our joy in today by keeping us in bondage to our past.

Paul lived this out. His testimony was one who used to murder believers, murder them. And yet, he was a new creation in Christ. And that's what we learn in II Corinthians Chapter 5 and verse 17 with Paul words: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** I want to say this again before I move to my last point: if you are being held hostage by Satan's desire to keep bringing up your past, you can be victorious over that.

I don't care what you did. I don't care how immoral you were, I don't care if you broke all Ten Commandments, I don't care if that list that I just read of all the sins of the flesh used to be the ones that were your goals in life, I don't care how awful you have been, I don't care how dark your heart was, how deep the addiction was, how much in despair you were, what sins you have committed or what sins have been committed against you - I can tell you this, there is freedom in Christ, there is victory in Jesus, there is hope for tomorrow, and your past has no right to keep you from that.

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That is what grace is about, that is what mercy is about. And so we embrace it and live fully in it. Don't talk to me about my past; it is under the blood. Talk to me about my future; it was secured by Christ at Calvary. So every day we wake up and we claim the victory that comes from a walk with Him. And don't let Satan accuse you. That is a big war for some people and it causes you to never feel worthy. It causes you to feel embarrassed. It causes you to feel shame. It causes you to hesitate. It makes you afraid if you step out you will fail. It makes you afraid that someone will find out what you have done in your past. And I am here to tell you, because the Word of God declares it - your past is dead. You walk in peace. You walk in grace. You walk in mercy. You walk in freedom. You walk without shame. You walk because you are His child. You are His daughter. You are His son.

Maybe you had an abortion. It doesn't matter. Maybe you were a drug addict. It doesn't matter. Maybe you had a filthy mouth. It doesn't matter. Maybe you were promiscuous in your teenage years. It doesn't matter, because when you give your life to Jesus you are born again and you are a new person. Put the past behind you and walk in peace and victory today. (*Applause.*) God has called you to do it.

The last thing is the fear which is inside. II Timothy Chapter 1 and verse 7 says: ***“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”*** We don't have to be afraid of losing this war. Why? It is because it has already been won. We don't have to fear what Satan can throw at us, because the worst that could happen is we may lose our life physically, but our spiritual life is well secured. And nobody gets out of this place alive anyway, so eventually it will happen. But for those of us who know Christ, we can walk in confidence and we don't have to walk in fear.

I am not going to lie to you I am not looking forward to death. I do not want to catch the next train head on or any other way. I am happy in my life, but I will say this, I don't have to fear the consequences of death even though they are unknown. I don't know what it is going to be like, but I know the one who is in charge of what it is going to be like, so I am good. And that confidence, that peace that Christ brings to our lives cannot be understood until we have that relationship with Him.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.