

Coromandel Valley Baptist; 8/5/96

Study one

Spiritual Warfare

Genesis 3: The battle joined

Satan led us in a challenge of God. We have a high calling to be lords in the creation, and a high nature of being made in the image of God. These have been the occasion (though not cause) of our fall. We desired to have independent knowledge of good and evil.

In so doing, we lost our true home. Fear and accusation, jealousy and violence followed, and then, the fortification of this in Babel. Behind the visible conflicts of this world lie these dynamics. In the attempt to play the great man, we have become piffling.

God, who created us and all things by his word, led on—in a now sinful world—by his direct word. Satan is our enemy because God has set us—and the Seed in particular—against him. It could not be otherwise. God would not leave this intruder in the world uncontested.

The battle will be fought at the level of the offspring—those who take their origins from the serpent will always be against those who take their origins from the offspring of the woman—the promised Seed in particular in which the ultimate battle would occur—bruising the heel of the Seed but the head of the Serpent himself.

Lifelong battering is indicated—'lifelong mutual hostility' (Wenham).

See Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12.

Woman would experience pain in her calling to childbirth and to rivalry with her husband. Man would experience pain in his calling of tilling the earth—now cursed.

All are subjected to exclusion from Eden. What we would not guard (2:15), God himself now guards (3:24), in order that he may present this garden to us in the age to come (Luke 23:43; Rev. 22:1-5). However, we were sent out of Paradise with hope that the Seed of 'the mother of all living' would fulfil our destiny and undo the work of the devil (I John 3:8). So God would vindicate this creation of his image and fulfil his calling upon us.

What we may now 'keep' is covenant. The battle itself rages around us with many elements we could not know, though we are still implicated in it and are responsible to stand in it. Victory is dependent on the Man chosen by God but we are involved through the keeping of covenant—walking in the victory assured by God himself. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith (I John 5:4). In the context of life's struggles, we are to live by hope (Rom. 15:1-13).

We sought to gain the initiative with God, but he has set the terms of the battle, and, through his Man among us, established its outcome. There is no strife that is not ordained by God (Psa. 76:10), nor any strife from which he cannot deliver us (I Cor. 10:13). His objective is not—for the moment—that we be without conflict, but that we are delivered back to our true resting place in himself.

Questions

- ❑ How should we understand the conflict we experience in this life?
- ❑ How does it alter our approach to warfare with Satan if we realise that God initiated it and has arranged its terms and conclusion?
- ❑ In the absence of Eden, what is our resting place in this life and this battle?
- ❑ What does it mean to keep covenant?

Coromandel Valley Baptist Church; 22nd May 1996

Study two

Spiritual Warfare

The warfare defined: Matthew 4

The battle of the ages is focussed here in humanity's Head. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8).

Christ has triumphed already and therefore, we begin our task from his victory and rejoice. To make our rejoicing await our last skirmish is to allow Satan to hi-jack the whole operation of the church. We do not battle our way to Christ; he has already embraced us and led us in victory to the Father. The warfare we have in Christ is to stand in the place he has given us, and to gather the whole family whom he loves.

Jesus Christ is the second Adam. Once again, the devil comes to subvert the purpose of God, but now, with all his venom, because this one will bruise Satan's head. Here, the battle is clearly defined and also clearly focussed in the Son. Outside of him, there is no real battle—only skirmishing to gain our own ends or to score points of self-justification.

The warfare is Spirit directed

The Spirit led Christ to the wilderness to be tempted. For ourselves, we pray 'lead us not into temptation'. None can feel ready for this conflict of themselves. The Spirit has stood us in Christ and, wherever we are in life, we bear witness. So the church is only to move as the Spirit moves.

The warfare is about communion

Satan has gone to the centre of everything—the eternal relation of Father to Son by the Spirit. Jesus is now in flesh and this eternal relation is accessible. The eternal relation is being lived out now in the context of our sinful flesh so as to re-establish for us our real union with God.

God gives himself to his Son. Everything he has made is for the Son. For this, we ourselves have been created. If he can sever this relationship, everything else will follow. Here is the substance of all temptation—to destroy the communion by which creation has its being and to destroy the communion of Creator with his Image. It is not only the relation of Father to Son but Father to the whole creation that is in question here.

Satan proposed a need driven sonship

In Eden, we doubted God's goodness and our contingency. In the wilderness, Israel hungered and doubted God. In them is reflected the distrust of all the world which

rages against the curse, and the variableness of providence, and complains if all things are not under its own control. Here is the beginning of the battle in so many cases.

In the wilderness where there is no distraction or sustenance, Jesus again faced this trial on our behalf. He lived by every word from God's mouth. His meat was to do his Father's will. He laboured for the meat which would not perish.

Outside of the word of promise by which we are assured of our relation to the Father, the desire for sustenance becomes a lust of the flesh. Need has been deified. Christ hears the word of his Father for humanity. He is secured by that word and does not need to have an inordinate craving for physical satisfaction.

Does the Church forget this when it is pushed from its central task by the command of the world to be cared for? Jesus showed the way later when he fed a multitude but taught them to seek for the food which did not perish (John 6).

Does God care for his creation? The only answer to this question for a sinner is the cross. Jesus remained true to the Father as the Christ and so there is a relation established for us all. No other answer replies to our doubt and anger, but there, our relation to God is established and the assurance of providence is complete (Rom. 8:31-39).

Satan proposed a son controlled relationship

Satan had no idea of the relationship with God in view in Psalm 91 when he quoted it. The writer made God his dwelling and loved God, acknowledged his name and called on God.

From Satan's point of view, if God has made provisions for human safety, that should then be available as a utility available at our will and for our purposes. But, is Christ's Messiahship for himself, or is it for his Father and so for us?

The point of the display could have been to display to Israel that he was the Christ. Miracles enough would be performed at the proper time, and, with a view to manifesting his glory, but only as the Father indicated. To listen to this word would have been distrust of his Father's good purpose and time. It would have been his own grasp at power.

The word Jesus listened to was the one addressed to Israel concerning their craving for drink in the desert (Exod. 17; Deut. 6:16). The enmity established by God between ourselves and Satan takes the form of whether we will accept the test to which God puts us, or whether we shall put God to the test for our mean purposes.

Israel failed in this test, but Jesus, in our place, has kept his humanity and his Messiahship, for the Father.

Satan (exposing his hand) proposed worship of himself

Satan thought that Jesus would want the kingdoms presented to him. But Jesus had in mind those same kingdoms purged of their Babylonian traits through his death and

through the sanctifying Spirit. Satan gloated over the lust and pride he had engendered in the world. Jesus only wanted a kingdom prepared for him by his Father (Luke 22:29). For him, life was about serving God alone (Deut. 6:13).

To arrive at the kingdom without the cross and the Spirit is the constant temptation for the church of Christ. Again and again, the offer is made of easy conquest, and because the objective is so clearly what must occur, we are in danger of selling out to Satan himself. Jesus had to say to Peter: 'Get behind me, Satan' (Matt. 16:23). He has to do it again when the church offers to the world a Christ without the cross for cleansing.

Summary

What the first Adam conceded in Eden has been contested in this Judean wilderness. Jesus has maintained a free and dependent relation with God as son, enacted through God speaking and himself responding. The devil will leave him for a season. The battle will finally be joined at Golgotha. But in his humanity, and in his battle, there has been no moving from the central issue. It is about us being sons and daughters of God. It is about us living by his word and not objecting to that listening being tested. It is to wait for the time of God and to refrain from testing to see if God 'is among us' (Exod. 17:2-7). It is to receive the kingdom appointed to us—the one shaped by Christ's passion and resurrection.

For consideration

- ❑ What do we mean by living by every word that God speaks? Would communion be possible apart from speech? How do the various temptations work to destroy communion?
- ❑ What difference does it make to facing what is in the world to know that Jesus Christ has overcome the tempter?
- ❑ Read I John 2:12-17. Note the encouragement which precedes this exhortation. Is there any other basis for us to face the world other than from this basis?

Coromandel Valley Baptist Church; 5/6/96

Study three

Spiritual Warfare

Christ the Victorious One—Colossians 1:11-20; 2:6-15

Christ defined spiritual warfare in his own temptation. Life is for, and from, love of the Father. This mortal struggle was maintained throughout his ministry. Jesus was the coming of God himself to take up the struggle which we abandoned (Isa. 59:15-20). Jesus saw the downfall of Satan as he headed for his cross (Luke 10:18; 22:53; John 12:31; 14:30f; 16:11). He was among us to overcome the powers of evil (Mark 3:23-27).

He announced from his cross: 'It was finished', meaning, not himself, but the work he had come to accomplish. This clearly, was to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8).

Colossians 1:11-20

We may therefore live with patience and joy—delivered from the dominion of darkness. This is explained in terms of Christ's pre-eminence. There must be no rival element left anywhere.

Everything owes its being and its future to this one because they are created through him and for him. In this sense he is the firstborn—of prime importance (cf. Psa. 89:27).

Christ has invaded the domain of death and conquered it. His pre-eminence in creation for the church has been secured by his being first also in regard to the 'creation' we tried to have—he became subject to our death (including then, all sin and pain) and became the firstborn from the dead.

Everything of God is in this Christ. There is no element in the creation which is outside the compass of its Reconciler. The status of the world has been changed when its Head has borne all its trespasses (see II Cor. 5:14, 18f). This has enormous implications: humanity as a whole cannot claim to be unattended, bereft of divine love; we can move in this world bringing the divine blessing—leaving cursing to God. The wideness of God's mercy is to be proclaimed everywhere.

The warfare which God has declared for us can only be fought in the completed work of Christ. As we must live in the Sabbath of creation, so we must live in the completed works of Christ and not become slaves again. Do not move from the hope of the gospel!

Colossians 2:8-15

Through Christ's blood, there is actual remission of the debt standing against us. We have fullness of life—meaning we are in Christ in whom is the fullness of deity. The communion we now have is objective, active and radical. The accusation of God's law is fixed to Christ's cross.

What effect has this had on evil powers? The deception they introduced has been undone. We remain with no doubts as to the goodness of God. The guilt they could accuse us of has been abolished. They have no power over God and this false power they used over us is now denied to them.

Conclusion

Colossians was written to people presented with alternatives to or additions to the fullness of Christ. This is often the form of the battle—to find something outside of God, as in Eden. We are called to look well at Christ and to stay in the fullness of who he is and the finality of his victory.

To consider

- ❑ What does it mean to say that Christ is pre-eminent in everything?
- ❑ If God is pleased to have Christ reconcile all things to himself, what is the status of the world when Christ says 'It is finished'?
- ❑ What does it mean to look at no-one from a human point of view (II Cor. 5:16)?
- ❑ What alternative 'fullness' is presented to us? Why do we need warning against it?

Coro Baptist; 19/6/96

Study Four

Spiritual Warfare

Revelation 12-14

The authority of evil and the victory of our testimony

The Dragon, the Woman and her Seed (Chapter 12)

The mother of all living would bear a Seed. This would be Israel's great Son and King and she longed for the coming of this great one (e.g. Luke 2:38).

But the Dragon, who had already led an insurrection, readied himself for the destruction of the Christ (described as in Psalm 2). The Child is quickly caught up—clearly, after having accomplished the ransoming of men for God. But what of the woman—the people of God? God has a place for her to be fed, and, a time of duration. The 1260 days, or 42 months, or time, times and half a time are all the same and have their significance because of the three and a half years Israel was without rain during the days of Elijah.

Angels see the significance of Christ's victory and eject Satan from any place of privilege in heaven. This is a sign of great exultation for us because our accuser is thrown down. But, like the angels, the victory of heaven is to be accompanied by our entering into the fray. Those who overcome are those who know the victory lies in Christ's death and who so believe this as not to put high store by their own lives.

Torrents (of accusation) flood from Satan's mouth against this woman, but she is aided by the creation. But warfare is still declared against the rest of her children—ie. the brothers of Christ (John 20:17; Heb. 2:11-12). These are characterised by obedience to God and faithful testimony to the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; I Cor. 1:18).

The Dragon and the two Beasts (chapter 13)

From the sea (cf. Isa. 17:12; 57:20) comes a beast who will aid the dragon in his quest for godhood—even to the extent of an imitative trinity. As God has given all authority to the Son, so the dragon gives his power to the beast. It imitated the saving work of Christ with a mortal wound which was healed—to the great wonder of the world. This raises the question as to why people had not already believed in Christ in the first place—but Satan has blinded the minds of those who follow him.

Note that Satan is referred to as a father in John 8:44f and I John 3:10-12.

We wonder why the beast is allowed such authority—even to conquering the saints (v. 7). But our conquering of the Dragon has already been noted and is confirmed later (12:11; 15:2) and this beast has no authority over us—that is, we do not worship it. Our names are in the book of life of the Lamb (cf. Luke 10:20). So we are to endure and to have faith.

The authority of the first beast is exercised by another beast—imitative of the Holy Spirit who exercises the authority of Christ in his presence. He seals the servants of the first beast as the Holy Spirit seals the servants of Christ. He conspires to make the world more welcoming to servants of evil than the servants of Christ. Great signs amaze the world. Their is only one way to avoid the deception and that is to live in the truth of Christ and his Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Visions of assurance (chapter 14)

The 144,000 are those sealed by God (7:2-4). What is important is not how they fared in this world but that they are with the Lamb in Zion and are singing with the unfettered and sanctified joy of heaven. They remained free from the adultery of idolatry. Their whole life flowed from and to the Lamb.

Three angels then appear who appear to represent the essential actions of God that are appropriate to the faithful during this action. One takes the gospel—in terms appropriate to the judgements being announced—to the world (cf. Matt. 23:33; Acts 2:40). The world must honour its Maker.

Another angel tells us that Babylon is fallen. She is later seen to be the harlot companion of the first beast (chapter 17)—an imitation of Christ's beloved Bride. Satan can only muster seduction—impure passion—to gather his people. A further angel sternly warns against complicity with the beast.

Again, those who love God's commands and the faith of Jesus are called to endurance, and assured of the blessing of true works (of faith) following them in death.

The harvests of the earth follow—firstly of the world's true harvest (cf. Matt. 13:36-43). But then, of those destined for wrath.

To consider

Compare the operation and limits of Satan's 'trinity' and 'harlot' with the Persons of Godhead and the communion granted to us in them.

What manner of conquering is appropriate to servants of Christ?

What encouragements do you find in these chapters?

Coro Baptist; 3/7/96

Study Five

Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-18—Readiness for battle

In *Ephesians*, Paul has spoken of the darkness from which we have been saved (2:2; 5:7, 11). This deliverance does not remain uncontested. In spite of the warning of Ephesians 6:24, the church had later to be told that it had lost its first love (Rev. 2:4).

Be strengthened!

The strength of the Lord must be according the power which raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God (1:19; so Phil. 4:13). The strength spoken of will be necessary to living in the blessing of God, the peace of the new humanity and the unity of the Spirit in all of the social relations described.

So Luke 12:34f; I Pet. 1:13. Cf. Psa. 62:11f and II Cor. 4:7.

Put on the whole armour!

God himself donned armour to fight Israel's battle for her (Isa. 59:16–17). Likewise, Messiah would judge with righteousness, and smite the earth with the rod of his mouth (Isa. 11:1-5; cf. Luke 11:22). This armour remains God's but is worn by us.

The opponent

The battle is in the heavenlies, with evil powers (cf. 3:10), the same arena in which we know blessing (1:3). The wiles of the devil are with a view to deception (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:14) and destruction (John 10:10; I Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:10).

The armour

Truth, which is Christ, but now, worked out in true living (4:15, 21, 25), yields a pure conscience. This is the integrity needed for battle, 'truth in the inward parts' (Psa. 51:6). Messiah was so equipped (Isa. 11:5). This armour remains God's. So the gift of integrity may be 'put on'. We are to put on Christ and make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14; cf. Luke 12:35; I Pet. 1:13). Paul said he commended himself in spiritual warfare by 'truthful speech' (II Cor. 6:7).

Righteousness as a breastplate may allude to the new man created in the righteousness and holiness in truth and to our being renewed in the spirit of our minds (4:23–24). In fact, there is no righteousness recognised by God which is not of faith (Jer. 23:6; Rom. 8:33–34) and there is no righteousness of faith which does not produce life consistent with its own character (so II Cor. 6:7; Phil. 1:11).

Also 'breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation' (I Thes. 5:8) and 'put on the armour of light' (Rom. 13:11-14).

We should think of participation in Christ's life rather than an appropriation of it (by emulation or by quietism). Participation acknowledges Christ's complete identification with our moral struggle and victory in it, and, acknowledges that our own battle of faith is a participation in what he has lived for us and now lives in us. E.g. Peter the Apostle was in Christ in his egotism and then humiliation, and in his restitution.

See Roger Newell article in Christ in our place.

Through the **gospel we have peace** (Rom. 5:1; Phil. 4:6) and a message of peace (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15) and by this we are equipped with readiness to live and proclaim peace (2:14–18)—as shown in the latter half of the book (4:3ff). Note the irony of being shod with peace with a view to war!

Through faith, ie. in the victory of Christ and the power of God, the darts of accusation are quenched. Nothing else can save us from these attacks. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith (I John 5:4).

Salvation was first the helmet of God—his saving deeds for us—and remains the armour of God. By this, we can pray confidently to be delivered from evil. The salvation we enjoy has to do with the last day (I Thes. 5:8) but is worn now.

The **sword of the Spirit or word of God** is for protection but is also deadly to the foe. It is the word of Christ (Rev. 1:16; 19:15; cf. Heb. 4:12 and II Thes. 2:8).

Cf. Isa. 11:4.

Prayer

All prayer at all times with all perseverance for all saints is commanded. Also, prayer for Paul's apostolic task (3:7–13). Like the Jerusalem church, they knew that boldness was God's gift in response to prayer (Acts 4:29). It is noteworthy that he felt need of this rather than liberty from prison.

Question

- From this passage, describe what it means to 'withstand in the evil day'.
- If God alone is true and righteous, how can we wear truth and righteousness?
- What is the difference between appropriation of and participation in Christ's victory? How does this change our view of faith?
- Discuss the use of this sword of the Spirit. It may be helpful to think of Biblical examples of its use.

Comments

'Christians of all persuasions need to wake up to an awareness of these ongoing struggles. In the words of G.K. Chesterton, they will make the world beautiful again by beholding it as the battlefield that it is: 'When we have defined the evil thing, the

colours come back into everything else". Under the perspectives of good and evil, God and secularism, there is more drama in the twentieth century than would ever be necessary to give profile to our lives. Sometimes our days get dull, because we forget the perspective of the battle that is often waged so invisibly and silently. But it is above all in these struggles that we today find the concrete concerns for our prayer, intercession, proclamation, and teaching. It is here that we are called to participate in those "real battles of Christ" They are prepared for us and assigned to us by the highest Authority, if we indeed strive to be found living by the Gospel' (Klaus Bockmuehl *Living by the Gospel* pp. 118f).

'It is important to bear in mind through the whole context that the central idea is fixity, not progress or conquest; ideas of which the Gospel is full, but which are not present here. The scene is filled with the marshalled hosts of the Evil One, bent upon dislodging the soul, and the Church, from the one possible vantage-ground of life and power—union and communion with their Lord' (Moule p. 154).