How Do You View This World: Battleground or Playground
Spiritual Warfare - What is really happening around us series – Part 1
Ephesians 6:11-12

There is always controversy somewhere. In those times, different people see the very same situation very differently and that greatly affects their emotions, perspective and response.

For example it’s football season, so in September I need to do at least one football illustration. In professional football in the United States there is a very talented wide receiver named Antonio Brown who has made the news a lot lately. It seems that the end of the last season, he refused to play a game for his team, burnt every relational bridge possible with the leaders of that team and demanded a trade. Another team, out in California, joyfully picked him up because of his talent. But before he played in his first game with them, he already had burnt many relational bridges and was let go by the team. Only hours later, our own regional football team (the New England Patriots) joyfully picked him up. Depending on how you see this, greatly influences your response.

- First we have those who don’t care. It simply is not important. Why did you even tell me this today? But when criminal sexual abuse charges were leveled at him late last week, all of a sudden for some of these it is no longer about irrelevant football but frustration with all the sexual abuse in our society.
- Second, we have those who feel this player is a malcontent. Why in the world would our NE team pick him up? He is just going to cause problems behind-the-scenes and hinder a otherwise good team.
- Third, we have those who see this as a great opportunity to win the Super Bowl again. He has a lot of talent and they are confident that the coaches will be able to rein whatever ego or harmful part destroyed the relations with the other two teams.
- And fourth we have those fans who do not like our regional football team, who now want some kind of investigation on how it was that only hours after he was let go by the 2nd team that the Patriots had already come to an agreement with him. Was there some calculated, unfair or dirty, behind the scenes work going on while he was still under contract with the 2nd team.

Notice the very different responses to the very same objective happening – whether it’s frustration or seeing an action as foolish or getting excited or seeing something underhanded. These very different perspectives lead to very different feelings, emotions and reactions.

You and I must remember that things for us are not only what they are – they are also what we hold them to be (REPEAT). Our perception of a situation, right or wrong, impacts us greatly. In fact, in the long run, on the personal level, our attitude towards things impacts us far more than the reality of those things. Consider today – what is our land like? There’s turmoil in our land, people are enjoying themselves, frustrating things happen and we love to relax.
Now go back to the founding and early development of our country. Was there turmoil in the land, people enjoying themselves, frustrating things happening and people loved to relax? Absolutely! But consider how the interpretation of these things changed over time!

Due primarily to the influence of Christianity on American thinking, people in *early America* conceived the world to be a battleground. People believed in sin, the devil and hell as constituting one force and they believed in God, righteousness and heaven as the other. These groups were opposed to each other by their very nature and they are in irreconcilable hostility. So every human person had to choose sides. One could not be neutral. It was a matter of life or death, heaven or hell, and if one should choose to be on God’s side, they could expect open hostility with God’s enemies. The fight would be real & deadly & last as long as life continued here below. People really looked forward to heaven as a time away from conflict and fully enjoying peace in the home Jesus specially prepared for them.

In our day, the facts have remained the same (*there is turmoil in the land, people enjoying themselves, frustrating things happening and people loved to relax*) but the interpretation has changed completely. People think of this world not as a battleground but as a playground. You’re not to fight, but to frolic. We’re not in a foreign land, but we are at home here. We aren’t preparing for the most abundant life ahead, we are already living that – to live the best life possible we need to rid ourselves of any inhibitions or frustrations and live life to the full. By the way this is not new, the words I just said to you were written back somewhere between 1950-1962 by *AW Tozer*— I just changed a couple words so it is the way we say things today.

Because it is easy for our perspective to have a *stronger* effect on our lives than reality, we want to spend the next couple months understanding what we can NOT see around us but is very real and very active. We want to understand, from God’s Word, what is happening in the *spirit world* around us and how God wants us to approach that. Because our base passage for this whole time is Ephesians 6:10-20, we are going to refer to this area as “spiritual warfare”. We live our lives on this planet in the midst of spiritual conflict.

**PROPOSITION:** There is a great spiritual conflict going on now on planet earth.

I. How do you view the world around us?
   
   **So our first question is **how do we view the world around us?**

   **A. Strictly material/physical**
   
   There is one part of our American culture that sees this life strictly in terms of the physical and material. All that is real is that which you can see, touch, taste or measure with a scientific instrument. This perspective was a lot of influence, so although incredibly more people will actually pray to an unseen God tonight than have sex – our movies, novels and TV series are full of sex but have virtually no prayer in them – yet that is called “reality”. We consider a person fully educated through the 12th grade without any discussion about God, spiritual beings or spiritual truths. Popular culture says we don’t need to consider the spiritual because all that is real and important is that which is material & physical.
B. A struggle with an opponent
There is another part of our American culture (and these overlap) that sees life as a struggle with an opponent—a human based opponent. When I was in High School, one of those was labeled the military-industrial complex. Today, people see a group that thinks, acts or believes different as an opponent to be battled. They think that life will be so much better if that human group can be defeated. It doesn’t matter whether you are a Republican or Democrat, a person wanting gun control or believing the 2nd amendment prohibits that, a person believing more should be done environmentally or that the dangers are overblown—there is a battle in life and it is against other humans. If one can defeat them, then the battling stops and life will be good.

C. A playground
Probably the largest group of our country sees life as a playground. “It really doesn’t matter what other groups are doing, I just wish they’d stop fighting” is a common thought. When this group does get involved in some societal battle they expect it to be over and done quickly—people should just do what they think. The key purpose of life is not the battles, but to be happy now, like a kid playing on a playground or going to an amusement park. The amusement, the playing, is what is consuming their time, what is most important in their schedule and their main goal for living. Work is a necessary evil to get to play on the weekend. Our opponent is anything that hinders us from doing what we want, when we want and how we want.

II. We have a very active spiritual enemy
Now let’s turn to scripture and see what God reveals to us about the reality that we all live in—day after day on this earth. What is really happening in this life? Who is our opponent? What impacts our lives? We will focus on Ephesians 6:11-12 today, but for context, I want to start with v 10 which we will tackle next week & end with v 13 which we will do in two weeks. READ Ephesians 6:10-13.

A. The devil & his schemes
Clearly we face an active spiritual enemy. READ v 11. We have a spiritual enemy. He is called the devil and he is actively opposed to us—scheming to take us down. So who is the devil? Down in v 16, the devil is also called “the evil one”. This evil spiritual being is called “devil” 35 times and “satan” 52 times in the Bible. “satan” is the Hebrew word for “accuser or adversary” while “diablos” is the Greek word for “slander or accuser”. Originally, satan was the angel Lucifer, or morning star, who was quite magnificent, powerful, and splendid. But Lucifer became prideful—he became jealous of God. He thought he should at least be on God’s level if not higher. And God cast him down. You’ll find the most details of that in Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. The devil has many other names like evil one, serpent, dragon, accuser, tempter, deceiver, murderer, liar—all pointing to the evil driving and consuming him. Three more titles point to the devil’s direct impact on our own world today. In John 14:30, Jesus calls him “the prince of this world”. He is called “the
god (small ‘g’) of this age” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and in Ephesians 2:2 he is called “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” The devil, or satan, clearly is exerting power and schemes in our current world and within peoples’ lives. Since the devil is just a created angel, he is not the counterpart of God and Jesus Christ is not his opposite. satan is finite and God is infinite, our enemy is infinitely inferior to God! He is on the level of Michael or Gabriel, two of the angels named in the Bible. satan is trying to deceive, slander, tempt and intimidate people. Even the worst human doesn’t come close to the evil of satan. He has no conscience, no compassion, no remorse, no morals. He feeds on pain and anguish and filth. There is nothing in satan which is redeemable. Along with this, he is extremely cunning. Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal – there is a deceitful craftiness at work. The devil lays a baited and camouflaged trap.

B. Not people, but the demonic Eph 6:12a
That spiritual enemy is our real, lasting enemy not the humans around us. READ Eph 6:12. When God has us think of warfare – it is not with other people. “Flesh and blood” refers to humans – physical living beings rather than spiritual living beings. If we are seeing our fight primarily with people or groups of people, then we have a faulty picture of life and the spiritual battle we are engaged in. We may end up trying to fight the very people God is trying to reconcile with or use for the advancement of His work! Besides spiritual warfare, Jesus also modeled and told us to be peacemakers with other people – including loving our human enemies. We don’t have a lifelong battle with other people. Since our struggle is not against “flesh and blood” that means our struggle is supernatural – there is more to reality & life than just what we can touch, see or measure. If we go no farther in the passage than this, we know that the 3 major ways Americans perceive reality (that I mentioned earlier) are ALL faulty – they are not reality – that faulty thinking will bring extra, unnecessary problems, pain and discouragements into our lives.

C. Powers of this dark world Eph 6:12b (Dan 10:12-14)
But our passage doesn’t stop here. Back to v 12, READ Eph 6:12b. Notice we moved from the singular of the devil to the plural of rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world. So clearly satan, or the devil, however powerful that fallen angel is, is not our only spiritual enemy. The words “rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world” refer to spiritual forces of evil. They are demons – angels who followed satan in eternal rebellion against God. To refer to them as a group, we call them “the demonic”. While we are never given details in the Bible of the exact hierarchy and uniqueness of these seemingly levels of the demonic, the mere words indicate a vast organizational hierarchy opposed to the One True God. The first two words have been used earlier in this letter while “powers of this … world” (that is a single word) only occurs here in the Bible but is used is used in ancient literature of world-ruling gods and of spirit beings who were said to have parts of our world under their control. This is reflected in Daniel 10:12-14 where the angel told Daniel that he was immediately sent by God with an answer to Daniel’s request but the “the prince of the Persian
kingdom" held him up in battle for 21 days until Michael the archangel came to help—that is not a flesh & blood prince but one of two demonic princes assigned to different territories specifically mentioned in the book of Daniel. We face a great demonic enemy with a defined and disciplined chain of command.

D. evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realms

Eph 6:12c (2:2, 1:20, 2:6)

Finally we have the phrase “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”. READ v 12. This final description, “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”, does not point to a separate category of supernatural spiritual powers but is a comprehensive term covering all classes of hostile spirits around us. Clearly they are all bent on evil – they are a fighting force together for evil. “In the heavenly realms” is the same as “the kingdom of air” in Ephesians 2:2. They don’t have any run of the highest heaven where Christ is seated at the Father’s right hand (Eph 1:20) and we believers are seated with Christ (Eph 2:6). But they seem to be able to move about freely around this world. These spiritual authorities are not represented as acting independently of the devil, but as his agents sharing some common objectives and strategies. Now the devil is a created being, he can only be in one place at one time. But all these demons are strategically positioned to spread evil everywhere. The Bible never gives a different strategy of resisting these evil spiritual authorities than it gives us to resist the devil.

III. Beginning reminders discussing this area of the spiritual world around us

A. This is not our greatest enemy Eph 2:1-3 [I John 5:19]

(John 16:33; Gal. 6:14; Rom. 6:1–6; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:19–23)

Compared to our human abilities and strength, satan is very powerful – but compared to God’s power he has virtually none! So any thought that we can counter this evil with our human tactics, effort, plans, or abilities is foolish. We need divine power, divine weapons, and divine guidance to have any chance of overcoming their evil power. As we are reminded in I John 5:19, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

Actually, as Christians, we face three enemies of our soul: traditionally these were referred to as the world, the flesh, and the devil (all three are reflected earlier in this letter in Eph. 2:1–3.) “The world” refers to the system around us that is opposed to God – it is culture opposed to the Lord and His ways. “The flesh” is the old nature that we inherited from Adam, a nature that is opposed to God and can do nothing spiritual to please God. And “the devil” refers not just to satan but satan and all of the demonic.

What’s fascinating in going through the Bible is that it is NOT the devil nor the demonic that is most likely to bring us down. Our biggest problem, as seen by how much is spoken about it and how much we are to focus on it, is our old nature inside of us. Then what gets second most attention are the aspects of culture around us that
oppose God or His ways. The devil and the demonic are only third! Don’t become unnerved or worried in our study. Don’t let fear come in when thinking about satan & the demonic. By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ overcame the world (John 16:33; Gal. 6:14), and the flesh/our old nature (Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:20), and the devil (Eph. 1:19–23). In other words, as believers, we do not fight for victory—we fight from victory!

B. The needed resources are available from God “armor of God”

God gives us the necessary spiritual power and spiritual resources to be victorious. Notice that v 11a says READ. The full armor of God is God’s resources we need for this battle, not our human abilities, efforts or plans. The supernatural, powerful, and cunning nature of our opposition makes the use of God’s armor absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, even the most dedicated American Christians can easily slip into a kind of functional secularism. Pretend you are a missionary in Africa or Asia. As you are sharing Jesus with them, they bring you some problems – what is your response to them.

- My crops aren’t doing well (you need to use better land management practices or more fertilizer)
- My son is sick (bring him to the medical doctor)
- There is major conflict in the world (we need better mediators & people need to be more flexible)
- I’m really depressed (go see a counselor)
- I’m not doing well financially (check in with this compassion ministry)

Now there may be nothing wrong with any of those answers but did you notice our immediate responses tend to all be human – human abilities, human knowledge, human practices. It is like we are functional agnostics. We rightly say the devil & the demonic are real spiritual beings actively at work around us, but we act as if these spiritual beings are in a realm far away from us and our two realms only occasionally touch or impact each other. The word “struggle” here describes a “wrestling match” or “hand-to-hand combat”. The spiritual warfare we face is in-your-face & close combat that is going to deal with our thoughts, desires, fears and pride.

C. Beware over-emphasizing spiritual attacks as much as ignoring them

Having said that, it is easy to move from our practical disbelief in the devil & the demonic to a preoccupation with them. Every problem is not from the demonic – in fact, most problems are not from the demonic – that is why the Bible spends immensely more time on the challenges that come from our old nature and the culture around us. Beware of over-emphasizing possible spiritual attacks just as much as ignoring them.

D. No fear: God is at work around us far more than we imagine
If fear arises during this study, then we are not rightly understanding what God is saying. If we are worried about satan and the demonic, then we aren’t seeing God as big enough. If we just ignore what’s being said or are very dismissive of the spiritual conflict around us, we’ll be defeated, imprisoned, and rendered ineffective. Sooner or later every Christian believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that we face an enemy who is much stronger than we are. And that is perfectly fine because we are under the supernatural protection of God. It helps us gain greater humility, it helps us rely on Jesus more deeply and it helps us to see that our main opponents are not the people around us, no matter how hard they are to live with!

As we sang at the beginning of our worship service today …

_A Mighty Fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing_
_Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing._

_Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing_
_Were not the right man on our side… Christ Jesus must win the battle._

So let’s acknowledge the _futility of fighting our spiritual battles_ with natural strength — let’s exhale the wrong type of self-confidence which thinks people & problems will suddenly change with one simple action. And let’s inhale God’s mighty power & use His spiritual resources in our everyday life. Next week we will look in a general way — what are spiritual enemies are trying to do. Now let’s sing our affirmation of the truths we’ve seen today in the verse of A Mighty Fortress we didn’t sing earlier. V 3 of hymn #333. And we will sing it _three times_ — same verse 3 times — each time let your mind, heart and will confirm stronger & stronger these simple truths about the spiritual warfare we face all the time!

(Please take the blue hymnal in front of you – some of them now have black borders – turn to #333 and let’s stand).