

FIGHTING THE NOBLE WARFARE

VICTORY OVER DECEPTION

Ephesians 6: 10-12—Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

II Corinthians 2:10—But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Revelation 12:9-10—And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 24—And Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one deceives you... Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ, and will deceive many. Many false prophets will arise and will deceive man... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

II Timothy 3:10-13; 4:7—But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all, the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived... I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

Let us pray:

Our Father, we come to You in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Only under His precious blood and only through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, can we expect an open heaven over us today. The enemy hates all exposure of his deceitful schemes. But because at Calvary You made an open show of him, we feel we can come today and share this precious word. So Lord, we pray that You would shine Your light into our hearts, revealing to us our Savior’s great victory, that we too might fight the good fight. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE NOBLE FIGHT

In this Scripture in which Paul says, “I have fought the good fight,” I would like to change that word to “I have fought the noble fight.” This will make the English translation more meaningful because in the original Greek it is speaking of character—“It is a noble fight that Paul has fought.”

What does this phrase mean—“a noble fight”? Now unfortunately, you and I get involved in a lot of fights that are not so good, and we often waste a lot of energy fighting the wrong fights. But Paul had saved his fighting for the noble fight, and it had produced gain for the kingdom of God.

EXPOSING THE ENEMY

Among Paul’s various fightings was the fight to expose the deceit of the enemy. Paul himself, as a Pharisee, had lived in deception and had even found himself fighting against the Messiah. But when the light shone from heaven, he saw this bondage of deception. He repented and came into the knowledge of the truth. And you cannot read Paul’s letters without realizing that he was a preacher of the truth. What a noble fight he fought!

We see in II Timothy 3:11 some biographical references to the difficulties Paul had in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Timothy was an eyewitness to these persecutions. He had watched Paul throughout his life suffering, wrestling, engaged in much warfare. He stood for the truth against the Judaizers and against false teachers. We recall that when he went to Ephesus, he was actually engaged in spiritual warfare against Artemis, witchcraft and demons (see Acts 19:24-29). But listen to his testimony: “What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me” (II Timothy 3:11b). It was a noble fight on high ground.

PAUL FOUGHT IN THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

As we read Paul’s last words—and probably this was the last letter of his that we have—we see something most wonderful. Why is this fight such a noble fight? After spending thirty-three years as a Christian fighting the good fight, the fight had not shaped him. What then had shaped the apostle Paul during those years? Was it the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in him? Was it his pursuit of the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul could say at the end of his life, “I have fought the noble fight,” because he had fought it in the character of the Lord Jesus. He had moments of discouragement and moments of trial, but the enemy could never draw him out to fight against flesh and blood. And so we see Paul in jail, saying, “I am still fighting the noble fight.”

The word *fight* in this passage is the Greek word *agona* from which we get “agony.” And he uses this same word when he writes the letter to the Colossians and says, “I want you to know how great an agony I have for you, for those in Laodicia who have not seen my face” (see 2:1).

Let’s consider Paul’s noble warfare. What would we do if we were left sitting in prison for years and years? Would we quit? Would we become discouraged? Would we begin to doubt? But this is not what we see in Paul. Even in prison, he was still wrestling for the sake of the saints. So in this last letter of II Timothy, we discover Paul spending the time helping young Timothy fight the noble fight. What a wonderful testimony of a man who bore the testimony of Jesus in his life.

Today, we are to fight the noble fight. When we go and share the gospel with this unclean world, we must learn to share and yet not become defiled by the world.

There is a noble fight to be fought even in church life. And it is not those lesser fights—flesh against flesh. Nor is it those negative views of one another or personal grudges. On the contrary, it is a fight to bring everyone complete before Christ. Therefore, if we are to fight the noble fight, we cannot be ignorant of the schemes of the devil. We must realize his schemes and his strategies.

THE SCHEME OF DECEPTION

Paul stated that we are not to be ignorant of the schemes of the devil, and now I specifically want to talk about the scheme of deception. We see in II Corinthians 11 a little picture of how crafty and wily the enemy is.

In verses 2-3 Paul says, “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Now here is a word for us as believers. We should not be deceived by the enemy's schemes. When we come to the Lord Jesus in simple faith, we are saved and kept by Him. Thus, we focus our inward eyes upon the Lord Jesus. So now, the enemy has a project to distract us from the Lord Jesus, using many devices in order to get our eyes off Him.

When we look at John 8:44, we see that the enemy has been lying and deceiving from the beginning with a two-fold plan to destroy man. “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

SATAN RULES FROM DARKNESS

Here we see two things. The enemy deceives us in order to draw us out of the will of God, and then he kills us. His end is destruction. Jesus said that he comes to steal, to kill, to destroy (see John 10:10a). But of course he is a deceiver; therefore, he does not tell you he comes to kill you. No, even as he deceived Eve, so he deceives men. The devil said, “Has God really said ...? Surely you will not die” (see Genesis 3:1, 4). He is so deceptive in his ways.

But when man fell into sin, he fell into a world of darkness. And in this place of darkness, he is at the mercy of this deceiver. We know that the enemy has a certain authority over mankind and even this world. But he must and can only rule out of darkness. If the light comes, it exposes his works; but he rules from darkness.

Of course, we know his number one deception is this: “I do not exist. There is no devil.” Therefore, a man who is lost and is doing whatever he wants to do thinks he is independent and free. Little does the sinner know that Satan has him in his full grasp.

As we know, this was our condition before we were saved. We said: “I have no master!” The devil said: “That’s right.” All the time he was master over us, driving our lusts and driving us to corruption. He has corrupted everything in this world. Of course, we may not know it, but there is corruption in every nation, in every marriage, in every family, in every job—there is corruption in everybody. We were on the way to death, but of course, the enemy was still saying, “You shall not die.” And so people live in darkness, even as they do what seems right in their own eyes; but the end is destruction.

Assuredly, we know this is the way of the world, and that is why we have a gospel of light to share with those who are in darkness.

DECEIT IS LYING WITH A DISGUISE

We begin to see that the enemy particularly uses deception upon God's own children by disguising himself. Hence, you understand that deceit is just lying with a disguise. We hear Paul saying in II Corinthians 11 that Satan even disguises himself as an angel of light (see 11:14). Therefore, we might hear him whispering to us: "This would be good for you. This will better your life. This will make you wise. This is the right thing to do." So many of God's children through the ages have been deceived by his deceiving ways.

Of course, through the ages, God has hindered the devil's schemes. By the light of the word of God, the enemy is exposed. Because of this, how important it is for us to know the word of God!

NO IDOLS

When God gathered the nation of Israel before Mount Sinai, it is no mistake that the second commandment given them was: "Thou shalt not make any idols." Now since the dawn of religion, mankind has been making idols. What could possibly be wrong with idols? Even our father Abraham used to make idols. They are just practical things—statues. So then, why did God say, "No idols!"? It is because there are spirits behind idols that bring the children of God into bondage. As soon as the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, they fell into immorality. But men are ignorant of the enemy's schemes. Today's idols (American Idol) or whatever we think is important is just the outward idol. There is a spirit behind it, trying to bring us into bondage. Therefore, God's word says, "No idols!"

Isn't it interesting that at the end of John's first letter, he says, "Keep yourself from idols" (see I John 5:21). As we have already stated, it is because of what is behind them. And when the Lord was giving orders for the camp of Israel, he gave the strictest prohibition to any kind of divination, witchcraft, necromancy—all because of the spirits behind them.

However, man lives in such darkness. Even King Saul was taken over by evil spirits; and in the end, he went to a witch to find out what he should do, rather than going to the Lord his God. How easily we are deceived!

David had a perfect heart towards Jehovah, but there is this interesting truth in 1 Chronicles 21:1 that says Satan stood up and provoked David to take a census. Now there are two opinions about why David took the census. Some say it was because of pride, and he wanted to number the population of his empire. Some say that the enemy struck fear in his heart, so he wanted to know how many soldiers he had. Whatever the reason, Satan provoked King David, and it cost him seventy thousand people. Oh, how the schemes of the devil are seen throughout the Bible! Thank God for His precious word.

The dear prophet Isaiah saw something behind Babylon, which was Satan himself on the throne. And in his great prophecy in chapters 13 and 14, he exposed Satan from behind the kingdom of Babylon, who planned to sit on the throne of God. Ezekiel saw a similar revelation behind the great kingdom of Tyre, where Satan was also sitting. What an amazing revelation this is! There are world rulers, even today, empowered by the enemy himself.

And then there was Daniel, who shed light on this great spiritual warfare over the kingdoms of this world. We remember how Daniel was praying and praying for several weeks and, finally, Michael came and said: “I had to wrestle with the great princes and spirits over Persia before I could come here.” Now the world does not believe this; but behind the nations of this world there are invisible principalities, powers and authorities at work trying to destroy and raise up rulers and powers according to satanic plans. The Christians recognize that when there is fighting going on, it is not the fighting on earth that is the issue; but there is something behind of a spiritual nature.

Even in the days of Israel, this is a true testimony regarding the power of God’s word. When God’s children lived in the light and power of God’s word, the enemy could not deceive them and lead them astray. But by the time of Jesus, Israel was creating its own light and living in it, and darkness had fallen upon the Jews.

JESUS CAME WITH THE LIGHT

At the right time, the Lord Jesus came. It says of Galilee: “They who dwelt in darkness have seen a great light” (see Matthew 4:16). When Jesus came, it was as if a great floodlight of truth had fallen upon the earth, and suddenly there were demons everywhere. Do you think there are any less today? Satan was so proud and deceptive that he even tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He used his best schemes against the Son of God, even using Scripture to try and deceive Jesus. *But* Jesus was the Word of God, and He rebuffed every attempt of Satan to have the mastery over Him. It was just as Jesus shared in his great parable—first he bound the strongman and then he looted his house, setting the captives free (see Matthew 12:29).

Is it not a wonderful picture of Jesus in the gospel? Wherever He walked, light fell on the place, and deception was exposed. People under the bondage of evil spirits were set free. These spirits have no power in the light. Wherever Jesus walked, the light of God fell, and people were set free from generations of deceptions and lies. And when Jesus spoke, the enemy had to flee because He spoke the truth.

JESUS EXPOSED THE ENEMY WITH THE PARABLES

In Matthew 13 Jesus spoke on the kingdom of God. There was a great conflict and violence going on in the kingdom of the heavens, and those who would be servants of the kingdom must lay hold of the truths found there. He also spoke of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens. Why is it that something that starts out good on the earth—the kingdom of God—ends up being corrupted?

Then we see in Jesus’ parables how He began to expose the enemy. The disciples asked Jesus: “What does the parable of the sower mean?” And Jesus said: “When the seed falls on hard ground, the enemy immediately comes along and snatches the word of God away” (see Matthew 13:4, 19). So now we understand that when the word of God is spoken, and the seed is scattered, for some it never goes into their hearts because the evil one is there, ready to snatch that seed away before it can germinate.

He also shared the parable on the wheat and the tares, and the disciples had to ask him what it meant. And this is what He said: “These are sons of the evil one sown into the kingdom.” What a strategy! Here is the kingdom of the heavens, and when nobody is looking, the enemy comes in the night and sows sons of the evil one in the kingdom.

But especially when we get to Matthew 24, which is about the end times, we hear our Lord say over and over again: “Be not deceived. Be not deceived! There are those who will come with power and signs. Do not be deceived!” And finally, the anti-Christ will come, the very personification of deception; and he will even try to deceive the elect.

THE CROSS EXPOSED THE ENEMY

The enemy’s deceiving strategies will go on until he is finally judged in the coming of the Lord Jesus. But, of course, we know that when Jesus died on Calvary’s cross, there was an open exposure made of the enemy and his ways, and this is spoken of in Colossians 2:15: “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

What a victory our Lord won in His battle in the light! In sending Jesus to the cross, Satan thought this was the greatest moment and strategy of all his deceptions. But it turned out that his own pride had deceived him, and his wisdom was exposed as foolishness. The greatest victory of all time was when Jesus died and rose again. The cross made an open show of the enemy and his defeat.

CHRIST’S VICTORY

Now the rest of the New Testament continues to talk about this matter of fighting the noble fight against deceit. But since Calvary, something significant has changed. When we read about spiritual warfare in Revelation, Ephesians or II Corinthians, and references are made to the evil schemes of the enemy, they are in the context of Christ’s victory. It is Christ’s victory that is foremost. If we would fight the noble fight, we look at the victory of Calvary; we no longer dwell on the spiritual conflict because the foe has been defeated.

Now it is important for us to understand his strategies and why we wrestle not against flesh and blood but with principalities and powers. The church which has been entrusted with the testimony of Jesus Christ has a very important job right now. In the word of God it says that we are to make the enemy a footstool for the Lord Jesus. And in the book of Revelation, the references made to spiritual warfare look pretty scary when you read all the various things that happen there. But what really happens is that the enemy is fully exposed and defeated. If you notice, there is no more deceit, and the enemy is out in the open. The antichrist, the false prophets, the harlots, and the kingdom that followed them, who are openly hostile to the Lamb, are judged, defeated, and sent to hell. The book of Revelation is about the victory of the Lamb at Calvary.

CONSECRATION

Now where does that leave us? One of the most important aspects of our wrestling is to overcome the deception that is in the world. Even though we have been saved by grace, the truth of the matter is that our mind needs to be renewed. We often speak of Romans 12 and the need for consecration. We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God; we are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And we see from this context, that this matter of consecration is not optional. Unless our mind is renewed by the Spirit we will continue to be deceived by the enemy in the world. Until his lies are exposed in the light, and until

they are dealt with under His precious blood, it is still possible for Christians to believe a lie.

THE MIND NEEDS TO BE RENEWED

“Who are you?” And this is what the enemy will tell you in answer to this question: “You are not a very good Christian. You can never be an overcomer. How can *you* be involved in tribulation in order to bear the testimony? No way!”

The enemy will also put these kinds of thoughts in your mind: “Everyone in the fellowship is spiritual but me. I need to continue to fake it, be deceptive and pretend that I am a Christian or my mother and father will give me a tough time.” How many Christians live in the good of the truth that they are a new creation? Most Christians lie and say, “I am more a person of the world than a person in Christ.” But you know that is not true. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation (see II Corinthians 5:17). We need to know who we are in Christ. I am telling you that the enemy will fight against who you are so that you will not claim all that you have in Christ.

Another thing the enemy is always deceiving and lying about is this: Who is God? This is what he will say to you: “Oh, I do not think God loves me. I do not think He is really my Father. He is angry with me, and I think He is going to kick me out. I really do not think I can trust Him. If I really give my life to Him, He will take away everything I like. I just cannot trust Him.” Hence, throughout the New Testament, we hear again and again: “Be not deceived; be not deceived.”

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT A CROSS IS DECEPTION

The enemy continues to attack our souls, but we must fight. This is the noble warfare. Place your life on the altar. Give the Lord your mind for His renewal. Let the word of God dwell richly in your heart and the light will shine. We must be done with the lies of the enemy. Unless we learn to wear the armor that has been given to us in Christ, unless we have that helmet of salvation squarely on our mind, unless we are girded about with truth, we can still be deceived.

How about you? Are you deceived by the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the boastful pride of life? The enemy works from Madison Avenue, and he always packages these things in a beautiful way.

If we are honest we can see that even the American dream is a deception. There are some dear brothers working eighty hours a week for the American dream; and all they do is work for wages with holes in their pockets. The American dream is something the enemy is using in the Lord’s church today. So be not deceived, because the enemy finds any way he can to get us into bondage in order that we will not be able to fight the noble fight.

The church today has suffered great loss—especially the testimony. The enemy has gained great advances. For example, Christianity without a cross is a deception. Paul said that all who would live godly in this life will suffer persecution (see II Timothy 3:12). Some people love the Lord and want to fight the good fight, but they define it as the “nice” fight. “Why can we not just be friends in the church? Why can we not just talk about good things?” As we well know, there is a part of the church that says, “Don’t talk about hell.” There are many, many Christians today who do not really believe there is a devil; therefore, they do not think there is really any spiritual warfare. To them, it is just

religious talk, and all the time, they are suffering loss, their marriages are falling into difficult times, and their children are being snatched away. Yet, they continue to say, “There is no devil.” And the devil says, “That’s right.”

THE TRUMPET CALL

We are in a great battle in this recovery of the testimony. I think you understand how deceitful the enemy is. He knows our weaknesses, and he takes advantage of them. There is a Scripture in Romans 13 that is a trumpet call for us to fight the noble fight and gain the victory over deception. We want not to only read it, but we want to live it. We want to be living in the light.

“Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly, as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (vv. 11-14).

Now we know from the book of Revelation that even as the end draws near the church is sleeping. The church of Sardis, which is still around today, has a reputation but no life. So the Lord said to the church of Sardis: “Wake up! And strengthen the things that remain.” Also, today, we have the church of Laodicea—self-sufficient and blind to this spiritual warfare. Oh, how we need to heed these words here in Romans!

Now I know that many of you serve the Lord, and just like Timothy, we are called upon to fight the noble fight. We need to help those who are younger to live in the light that they might not be deceived.

As servants of God could we consider these three questions before the Lord that have come from this Scripture in Romans.

1. Are we awake?
2. Do we know what time it is?
3. Do we know how near our salvation is?

Then let us cast off the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. It is time to be done with those things of darkness. May the Lord shine His light on us in these days and expose those things by His light that need to be cast aside. On the other hand, we cannot just stand there naked and vulnerable. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh. Now this is the noble fight. May the Lord help us to be faithful.

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we thank You for the great victory that was won at Calvary. And we see the testimony of Paul and how he lived in that victory. You shone the light on him and he turned from deception and fought the noble fight. Lord, we pray that You would have mercy on us and help us in this late hour. We do not want to be deceived by our sleepiness or by our blindness, but we want to properly assess this warfare that we are in. Lord, we want to be shaped by our pursuit after Thee. But we pray that You would deliver us from ignorance of the schemes of the devil. So help us, Lord, we pray; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

