

Spiritual Warfare – Ephesians 6

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A senior devil advising a lower rank devil:

He [God] has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least. Things like sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it is any use to us. We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side.

Screwtape to Wormwood, in *The Screwtape Letters, Letters from a senior to a junior devil*, by CS Lewis (1942)

Ephesians 5:22-6:9 falls within the realm CS Lewis is describing. Husband and wife, parents and children, employer-employee relations, friendships. These are the most important areas in our daily normal life. This fills our life and God loves it. He created us for this.

As He is a communal being, so are we.

We do not do these normal things of life in a vacuum – we do them in a life that is filled with God and with his enemy. We have a host of spiritual beings – angels, our forefathers, around us and looking at us. This world is a spiritual world, what we see is not all there is, and what we do is important.

God created us in our social relationships – and that is the area of his blessings... and of our greatest problems. Men fight their wife (food is not served in time, they spend too much....) Wives blame their husbands (you do not talk enough... how do you feel... why did you not get promotion like your colleague)

We fight about how to raise our kids. We fight with our kids.

And in the workplace there is much to enjoy – as God wants it – and much misery as well.

The Result? A lack of love, a lack of respect, much powerplay, even in families, masters ruling over employees, children hating their parents.

Terms Paul uses in describing those *ideal* relationships in Ephesians 5 and 6 are: do the will of God, submit, love, honor, obey, respect, serve, and all this with a sincere heart...

Imagine that in our social relationship we would live those key words... Our marriage, our work, our relationship with our kids, our friendships would be sublime.

But the devil is able to twist all good things into something bad. That is why Paul also says in Ephesians 5 and 6: do not provoke, do not act as a people pleaser, stop threatening. Because these negative attitudes creep into our relationships easily.

The advise of Paul? Submit. QUOTE Eph 5:21.

Submit to your husband. Submit to your wife. To your children. To your parents, to employees, to employers, to your friends.

Paul speaks of course in the first place in the context of the church. The concrete people who meet each other there.

How is this possible? It feels so unnatural! But it is not. If only we realize we are all servants of God. All dependent on his grace. All equal before him. QUOTE Eph 6:9.

Problem of our social relationships is that they very easily slip into fights where power, lust, jealousy, strength are the major issues. "I am right I tell you what to do. If you do not listen then I will... I demand my right!"

God [God] has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least. Things like sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working.

But the devil is twisting much of it. To waste Gods intentions with this world and with you and your life.

Now all this, forgive me, is my introduction to bring us to Eph 6:10 and further. QUOTE Eph 6:10

Finally, Paul says. FINALLY. This is not the finally that opens a whole new topic, but, Paul *summarizes* what he said before. Like the preacher who says: now let me summarize. He summarizes what he just said about human relationships and the problems we face in those relationships.

The heart of the solution? QUOTE Eph 6:10: do not try to be strong in yourself. Do not focus on your powerful position. Do not assume that because you are stronger, higher, richer, you are more right.

Do no bully your wife, or your child, or your employee. Do not build you self-image on being harsh against your husband or employees or you parents.

Find your true strength in the Lord. The one who loved the church to the extent that He died for it. Who served all people. Who does the will of God. He served women and children and slaves. May Jesus Christ and his example be our strength in life.

In your social relationship, marriage, work, friendships, do focus on Christ, not on rights and power and who comes first.

Power play is not acceptable for Christians; those are games with the fire of hell. We are to

submit to each other out of reverence for Christ who gave his life for all. Even for mean wives, bad children, lousy parents, and for friends that cheat us, and awful employees and employers that we would rather hang...

We must stand against the schemes of the devil and realize that those problems we suffer are not in the first place because your wife never listens to you or because your employer only wants to suck as much out of you as he can.

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. It is the devil who is throwing poison in our social relationships.

Last week we saw that Paul says that we have to *redeem time*, because the days are evil. He repeats that idea here, QUOTE Eph 6:13

Be aware of the schemes of the evil one. The difficulties in your marriage, in your work, with your kids, they are part of his scheme. He is twisting all good things to make them ugly. He is the source of disunity.

The problems we have are normal, human problems. But the evil one is the great schemer – creating disunity and strife. He turns what is good in itself, into something bad.

There is a cosmic battle going on, for our minds and hearts. This is real. But it is not useful to envision that as if angels and demons are involved in cosmic sword fighting, as in a sort of star wars. The battleground is not in a faraway spiritual location. It is here. In our own midst. And it is here that we have to win the battle. By solving the problems we have here. The problems of daily life.

In a conflict with other people, what do we do? Focus on our rights? On our strength? Hate the other person? Use power?

No! When the evil day comes, we submit to each other.

The weapons in the spiritual warfare for saving our relationship and for restoring them to what God intended, are mentioned here by Paul.

These weapons are
truth, not lies,
and righteousness, not being mean
readiness to serve the other,
faith in God instead of fear of people,
salvation that liberates our whole being
the word of God that tells us how to live,
prayer that links us to the God who loves all
people....

Those are powerful weapons because they do not defeat the other person, but they defeat the devil who wants to waste our relationships. And they help us show love and respect for the other.

An interesting comment about these weapons is found in St Jerome, in *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.6.11:

From what we read of the Lord our Savior throughout the Scriptures, it is manifestly clear that the whole armor of Christ is the Savior himself. It is he whom we are asked to *put on*. It is one and the same thing to say *Put on the whole armor of God* and “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

What a way to solve relationship problems! What a way to cooperate and live together in the love and peace and joy that God wants us to live in.

Power, lust, jealousy, they are gone when truth and readiness, faith and prayer rule! Then we are standing firm against the evil one who wants to twist all beautiful things God gave us in life.

We defeat the purposes of the devil. We defeat him. And we do this by mutual submission. By love, by truth, readiness, righteousness. By caring for each other as Christ cares for us.

God gave us many beautiful things – marriage, friends, work, children, he gave us beautiful things to do: like sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working.

God has chosen these very normal, but major things of life to be a blessing for us. These are the very things that make our lives pleasant and beautiful. OR they become areas of life that smell evil as hell....

If God chose they basis things to be a blessing for us, we must be so careful that we do not become so over-spiritual, that they do not count for us in the service to God.

A truly spiritual person serves God by sleeping, and loving, and eating and working and helping and caring for the others with a heart filled with the love of Christ. That is where we win the battle.

Every moment in time, whatever we do, can be a moment for God. Do not allow the devil to twist it into something ugly. And do not allow the devil to think that these totally normal, God given areas of your life, are not important. They are important because that is where God blesses us, if we redeem each moment and situation from the grasp of hell. By loving each other in humble submission.