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The Continuing Campaign



Spiritual Warfare - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the battle between Satan and God's people, emphasizing the importance of spiritual survival over physical survival. He encourages Christians to embrace biblical truth and reject cultural norms that contradict it, even if it means standing alone. He also emphasizes the need for spiritual aggression without resorting to physical violence or fleshly methods, advocating instead for the use of spiritual weapons to overcome the enemy. Gregg concludes by urging Christians to press in and advance the kingdom of God through obedient and aggressive action.

Transcript

Let's turn just again briefly to Revelation chapter 12. That's the passage we looked at carefully in our first introductory session. Remember that in that chapter, after the male child of the woman, which male child was Christ and the woman was Israel or the remnant of Israel, after that male child was caught up into heaven, Satan was cast down to the earth.

And the woman herself, which is almost certainly the remnant of Israel, fled into the wilderness and was sustained there by God. The length of time is not of greatest importance to us at this point for our consideration, but it says in verse 15, So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Now, we see here that the dragon is angry first of all with the woman, and also he makes war with the rest of her offspring. Who are the rest of her offspring? Well, she had one child already earlier, that was Jesus.

The rest of her offspring are described as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. That's not a hard group to identify. That would be the

church, the believers.

Now, the remnant of Israel, of course, were the Jewish believers who lived in Israel and who escaped from Israel before the destruction came upon the city of Jerusalem. The flood that came out of the dragon's mouth is not easy to identify. Some people believe that it represents the armies of Rome.

It would not be the first time in the Bible that an invasion of armies was likened to a flood. For example, in Isaiah 10, the invasion of the Assyrians to the northern kingdom of Israel is described as an overflowing flood coming and overflowing the land up to the neck. So here also the flood might represent the invasion armies, but the woman is safe from them, she has escaped.

But it is also possible, since the flood comes out of the dragon's mouth, and since what comes out of mouths is usually words or thoughts being expressed, that the flood might be a flood of deception, a flood of lies, that Satan finding himself unable to destroy God's people through violence alone resorts to a secondary strategy of deception and lying. We know that historically the church has been damaged by both forms, physical violence, that is persecution, and corruption through false doctrine and heresy. Right from the very second century on, even before that, in the first century, the church suffered from physical violence as well as from spiritual problems caused by heresy in the church.

And these may be here reflected as the two principle means by which Satan attacks the people of God. As the chapter closes, we see him continuing his campaign against those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. And I believe that this campaign has continued now since the time of Christ to the present.

Now let's turn to another passage we've already looked at. That's Ephesians chapter 6. I'd like to read just a few of these verses. We'll have occasion in other lectures to look at other verses in this same chapter.

In Ephesians 6, 10-12, Paul says, Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, and against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

And then he goes on to enumerate the parts of our armor, which we will not at this point look into, but we shall on another occasion. We have then an ongoing battle between the dragon and those who have the testimony of Jesus, the church. I have already suggested that the battle is over the minds of men.

And it's not so much that the devil is only concerned with the minds of the Christians. It's

just that only the Christians really give him a fight. Basically, the non-Christian is already his captive.

The non-Christian is already enslaved. But the Christian's struggle is twofold. It is defensive and it is offensive.

This is, of course, true of all wars and it is certainly true of the spiritual warfare we're in. In a natural war, where soldiers are going out to battle against other physical soldiers, there are two objectives. The first to be considered is the defensive objective.

Every soldier hopes to stay alive. Now, that objective is not, in the case of natural war, the highest objective, because a soldier goes to war knowing that he may not stay alive. In fact, if he was committed entirely to staying alive and had no other objective than that, he wouldn't go to war in the first place.

He'd defect. He'd go AWOL or something, because war is a dangerous place to be. But at the same time, every soldier hopes to come home alive.

When he goes to war, he's going to do what he can, at least within the realm of his duty and following commands of his superiors. He's going to try to stay out of harm's way. Even if he's in the battle, he's going to try to kill the enemy before the enemy kills him.

Therefore, defense is a concern of every soldier. And the Christian has to be concerned about his own survival, not his physical survival, but his spiritual survival, spiritual self-defense, because the devil comes against us to corrupt us and destroy us. Actually, I don't believe that the devil's primary interest is to kill us physically.

There are times when that is his desire. There are times when he accomplishes that desire. Christians die at the hands of wicked men, instigated by Satan.

But I don't think that's Satan's primary concern. Satan knows that if we die, we go to be with the Lord. He may get us out of the way, and we may cease to be a serious problem to him, but we might not.

Think of the martyrs, Jim Elliott, Pete Fleming, Nate Saint, these guys who went down to the Akha Indians. They were killed, but the devil didn't get rid of them that easy. As a matter of fact, it caused the devil more problems.

If you remember, this story occurred about 1955. These five missionaries were killed by the savages that they were going down to evangelize. But the news of their martyrdom was so inspiring when reported that over a thousand college students enrolled into mission organizations, inspired by the story of the death of these five martyrs.

That certainly backfired on the devil big time. And the devil has had other problems. It is said that during the time that the Christians were fed to the lions and burned at the

stake and hacked up by gladiators during the times when the Roman Empire persecuted the church in the 2nd and 3rd century, that when martyrs died in the arena, people in the stands got converted.

And that is why Tertullian uttered the famous statement, the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. As Christians die, new Christians are converted to fill the ranks. As a matter of fact, it is estimated that for every Christian that died in the arenas, that more than a dozen converts in the stands were made.

So that the devil lost ground by killing Christians. That doesn't mean he never does it. Some Christians are just too troublesome and he wants them out of the way.

But he always takes chances when he kills a Christian. And by the way, he can't without God's permission. But there is always the chance that a Christian who dies faithful and heroically might inspire other Christians, might even make additional Christians through his death.

The devil gains a great deal more if he can corrupt a living Christian, cause that Christian's testimony to be destroyed, cause that Christian's walk with God to be undermined and compromised. The devil gains a great deal more in the long run by causing a Christian to backslide or to destroy his testimony by sin than he does by just taking him out of commission. And for that reason, we know that the devil may seek to kill you physically, but whether he does that or not, he will seek to corrupt you.

And your spiritual survival is your first obligation in a sense. It may be heroic to say, well, I would give up my salvation for the salvation of others. Paul said something like that in Romans chapter 9. He said, I could wish myself a curse from Christ, if it would mean the salvation of my countrymen Israel.

But of course, Paul was not making a statement that could actually be realized. You can't trade your salvation for that of someone else. Paul was speaking hypothetically and he was not suggesting that it's actually a good thing to give up your salvation for any purpose.

Actually, you can do nothing for God, nothing for anybody else. In terms of spiritual benefit, if you gave up your own walk with God, if you compromise your walk with God, you become ineffective and worthless in the spiritual battle. Just as a soldier who shot down on the field becomes incapable of doing anything more for his side once he's been taken out.

So your spiritual survival, your spiritual integrity is one of the objectives in the battle. You need to make sure that you are not compromised and you are not spiritually harmed. Physical survival is a different issue.

In fact, it's very interesting if you'll look at Revelation 12.11, a very well-known verse.

We read it earlier and we'll have other occasions to consider it in the future as well. Revelation 12.11 says, They, meaning the brethren, overcame him, meaning the devil, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Now what's interesting here is we're reading of the winning. These people won. They overcame him.

They overcame the dragon. And yet they did so, in part, by not loving their lives even to death. Some of them died, but they still win.

It's interesting that in this spiritual warfare, the goal is not to stay physically alive, but it certainly is to stay spiritually alive, to stay spiritually intact. If you stay physically alive but you are spiritually compromised, then you've lost. If you die faithful, you win.

Being faithful unto death is overcoming the wicked one. Jesus said in Revelation 2.10 to the Church of Smyrna, He says, Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. You win.

You get the victor's crown if you die faithful. That's victory. Don't think that staying alive physically is the objective in spiritual warfare.

Those who win sometimes don't live, don't survive. They love not their lives to the death. In fact, if survival is your objective physically, then you cannot win because those who overcome are those who don't love their lives, who don't make it their primary goal to stay physically alive.

Survival in the physical sense is not the chief motivation of the Christian. It is of the unregenerate, but not of the Christian. That is why we can win because we see our physical lives as expendable.

We don't consider our righteousness and our holiness to be negotiable. It is a matter of not being concerned for our physical safety, but being concerned about our spiritual integrity. This is the spiritual survival that is our objective.

There is also the offensive objective in spiritual warfare. That is, as in all wars, to secure and take territory from the enemy, to take captives or liberate the captives that the enemy has taken. I'd like to suggest that the offensive, aggressive objective of spiritual warfare is to press into territory where Satan's rule has not been challenged, and in doing so, to take that territory for the kingdom of God.

When I say territory, there are two fields I'm thinking of. On the one hand, there's the territory geographical. There are places in this world where the gospel has never been preached, where the name of Christ is not known, where people live and die without any opportunity to know that Jesus came and died for their sins, and they do not know the

gospel.

That territory, that geographical land area, has to be penetrated. And spiritual territory in your own life. Your spiritual warfare also involves seeking to take from the enemy those territories in your own spiritual life that you have not really taken for the kingdom.

Areas where the devil's authority has not ever been really challenged there. Now, you might say, well, I'm a fully committed Christian. There aren't any areas in my life where the devil's authority hasn't been challenged.

But you'd be surprised. I mean, Christian growth involves discovering things about yourself. Areas of former ignorance, areas of former compromise.

I would hope it is true that you could say, I am not aware of any area of my life that is not surrendered to God. I am not aware of any area of my life where the devil still controls. It would be very nice if you can say that.

I hope you can. But even if you can say that, I will take you at your word. But that does not mean that there are not areas in your life unknown to you, which have yet to be disclosed, unveiled, through the Spirit of God, revealing to you through the study of Scripture or through other means, areas of weakness, areas of compromise, or simply blind spots, we might say.

Areas of deception, where you believe something that isn't true, but your study of the Scriptures and your walk with God will result in more light as time goes on. And when those territories where deception has reigned are discovered, they need to be taken. How are they taken? Well, there are areas of deception where the truth has to be brought in.

Now, you might say, well, that sounds easy enough. I am a Christian. I want truth.

But when it really gets down to it, love of the truth becomes very expensive at times. Because we are persons interrelated with a lot of other persons and with the world around us. And we have, more than we know, probably, accommodated our beliefs and our practices to that which is acceptable in the group that we have sought to be accepted in, whether it's culture in general or whether it's our church or our denomination or our circle of friends, whoever it may be, we find a certain amount of our security in belonging, in being accepted, in not being rejected.

That's kind of our human nature. Now, I'm not saying that's right or good, I'm just saying that's the way we tend to be. And because of that, we all find, in a sense, a comfortable niche.

When I say we all, there may be some exceptions, I'm just not aware of any. I don't want to say this has to be universally true of all people, but I'm just not aware of anyone that

it isn't true of. We accept the gospel, we accept the claims of Christ, but we, perhaps inadvertently, interpret them or apply them in such a way as typically fits in with the way that our denomination or our culture or our family or our friends essentially approve.

And we realize, perhaps all of us have taken an unpopular stand in some respect, for instance, if you're pro-life or if you're against the homosexual agenda, then obviously you're taking an unpopular stand against the culture. But even in doing so, you know that you've got friends on your side. Evangelicals agree with you.

Your friends agree with you. You have acceptance. You may be willing to take a stand against some error.

And you feel like, well, see, I'm not taking the comfortable route. I'm not taking the easy, popular route. I'm taking a stand on this issue.

But even more than we realize, there are support networks that we have. I wonder if you have ever taken an unpopular stand that no one agreed with you on, and which might have made you very unpopular for taking it. If you have, then you know what I'm talking about.

Truth can be expensive because even Christians often have cherished traditions, cherished blind spots, cherished compromises. And if you study the scriptures, if you go on with God, you begin to see practices in Christian lives, practices in the church, teachings in the church, and many things that are accepted generally in our culture, both the secular culture and the religious culture, which are at odds with what you'll find the Bible says. At times like that, you find out how costly it is to be valiant for truth because suddenly the group that you have found identity with and solidarity with may not agree with you anymore.

This may endanger your security and your acceptance within a group. And it is essential that we love the truth enough to sacrifice everything for it. Now, I have been fortunate in that whenever I have changed my mind about something, I have either found friends who either changed their mind along with me or else at least tolerated my change of mind.

But there have been some circles I've been in where I've had to just stand alone, at least briefly, until I could convince some others of my way of thinking on some things. But I've had to stand alone on some issues where I just felt like, well, I don't see that the Bible teaches that even though everyone in my church teaches that. Everyone in every church I've ever been to teaches that, but I don't see it in the Bible and I can't support that anymore.

There are times when that's not so unpopular. Some people are out there just looking for some new wrinkle. There are some people who have itching ears and who are, like the

Athenians, always eager to hear some new thing.

I don't recommend that. I don't want people to agree with something I say that's different just because it's different. But I would hope that all Christians would say, I'm after the truth.

Because wherever there is untruth, wherever I have a wrong idea, wherever I have misinformation, wherever my perception of doctrine is wrong or of ethics or whatever, whatever is wrong, that is an area where Satan is still deceiving me. That's an area where there's territory to take from the enemy. And that territory is taken by the advance of truth.

And so the offensive objective of spiritual warfare is to press into territory where Satan's rule has not been challenged. And to claim that and take that territory for the kingdom of God. When it comes to geographical territory, that usually means convincing people of the gospel.

That usually means making disciples. When it comes to spiritual territory in your own heart, it means convincing yourself and having the courage of your convictions. If necessary, even to stand alone until God sends you some company in your convictions.

But it's essential that you never compromise the truth. Where you are exposed to something that you perceive to be true, but you cannot pay the price for that. You can't accept that.

It'll cost too much. You are at the crossroads of a battle for your soul, for part of it. And it's interesting that the man of sin comes and deceives, it says, those who do not receive the love of the truth.

And the very next verse in that passage in 2 Thessalonians says, therefore God shall send them strong delusion that they might believe a lie. Now, it's not that God determines who's going to believe lies. He already identifies the ones that he's sending strong delusion to, those who have not received the love of the truth.

Those who have had access to truth and have not embraced it, who have not loved it. They are the ones that God says, okay, you don't love the truth? Well, then I'll give you what you love. I'll send you strong delusion so you can believe a lie.

God actually judges those who do not love the truth. My impression from this is that the teaching of Scripture is that if you don't love the truth supremely, you're not worthy of it. And you can't have it.

And so we need to be disposed to embrace truth whenever God shows it to us from Scripture or to our hearts. That doesn't mean that whenever someone presents a scriptural verse or argument that you have to accept that because their interpretation,

mine included, might be mistaken. You don't have to accept my suggestions of what I think the Bible means as true if you don't perceive them to be so.

But you do need, as God shows you the truth, as God opens your eyes, you need to make sure you don't back away from it for fear of becoming unpopular or losing something. Buy it. And it gets very costly.

War is hell. And it gets very costly. As a matter of fact, it says in Proverbs 23, 23, an easy reference to remember, Proverbs 23, 23, it says, buy the truth and do not sell it.

Buy the truth and do not sell it. This doesn't mean that truth can actually be purchased with money. What it means is obtain the truth at any cost and don't sell it for any price.

It's not talking about buying it with money. It's saying that you should be willing to part with anything in order to obtain it. And you should not part with it in order to obtain anything.

You should not sell it for any price. It suggests that truth is, in a sense, supreme, the supreme value. And it is the battle for the truth that we are engaged in.

Now, as Christians, we're engaged in a battle over our own souls because the devil is aggressively trying to destroy our Christian life. There is a sense in which our battle is also for the purity and integrity of the church itself because we're not simply individuals out there like Rambo fighting the whole Viet Cong all by ourselves. We're part of an invasion force, the church.

And the well-being of the whole force is our interest. If the church goes down but we're left standing, well, we may go to heaven, but that's not really a very good victory. You know, we want all the church to go to heaven.

We want all the church saints to be free of deception. There are times when a man like Luther has to stand up and say, I don't care that the church disagrees with me on what the gospel is, I've got to take a stand by myself on this. And though his life was at stake and they threatened to kill him if he didn't renounce his convictions, he said, it's neither open to us nor safe to violate the conscience convictions we have.

And he says, I have to stand alone if I stand at all. I may have to stand alone here. But there are times when the whole church might resist you, as Luther found, but whether that's the case or not, you need to be concerned about the whole church.

Our warfare is a warfare for the sanctity of the church. It's not just that I'll be the last man standing, spiritually speaking, but that if I stand, it is to stand for the interests of the church, for the body of Christ, for the kingdom of God, for God's purposes in the earth. Of course, the best thing I can do for the church is be faithful myself to God.

If the church is less faithful, that's the worst for the church, but I don't have to be unfaithful. But my faithfulness, if it is there intact, is more likely to do good for the church ultimately than for me to compromise and go with the church in a compromised position. The church needs pioneers.

The church needs people who will stand alone, even against the church's convictions. Eventually the church comes around in many cases. But we also have to move into the territory where the church isn't, because the souls of the lost are God's concern also.

After all, we were them once, and we're now the church, and it's God's desire that all things be gathered together in Christ, that is, in the body of Christ. Look at Ephesians chapter 1. We'll see what God's purposes are, and that defines basically our commission and our objective. It says... This is a very long sentence, a 13-verse long sentence.

I will not start at the beginning of it. But verse 9 says, in Ephesians 1, 9, Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to the good pleasure which he purposed in himself, that, in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in him. So, God's purpose, which he's made known to us, is that he wants to gather all things together in Christ.

He doesn't want one area of human activity to remain outside the dominion of Christ. Therefore, it is our goal to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, not just our own thoughts, but the thoughts of all. This is the objective.

Christ is not satisfied that a few people are saved, or most people are saved. His desire is that all would be saved. And that is the battle we're fighting, because our enemy doesn't want that to happen.

There is a very important story in the Old Testament that I think illustrates the state of the battle that we are in. Now, the story is so important that I think the devil has tried to trivialize it by making it a familiar Sunday school story that every child hears from childhood and becomes so familiar with it that it seems to be only another pleasant story and its true significance is obscured, and its power, and its spiritual potency. That is the story of David and Goliath.

You may have heard me say things about this before, but I think the story of David and Goliath is a very apt type of the spiritual warfare that we are in. David is clearly a type of Christ. There is no question about this in Scripture.

David is a type of Christ. Perhaps one of the most significant types of Christ in the Bible. Goliath, I personally am going to suggest, is a type of Satan.

And the fight that occurred between David and Goliath is a picture of the conflict between Christ and Satan. You know, this story is in 1 Samuel 17. I'm not going to be

reading from it, but if you want it in your notes.

In 1 Samuel 17, we are told that Goliath came out and he put a challenge. He was a Philistine. And he said to the Israelites, send me a champion to come out and fight with me.

And if I kill him, you Israelites will be servants of us Philistines. But if your champion kills me, then my people, the Philistines, will be servants of your people, Israel. In other words, we don't just have a conflict between David and Goliath like a boxing match.

Where one guy ends up the champion, the other guy ends up the loser. One guy goes home rich, the other guy goes home less rich. We have a situation where just the fortunes and fates of two individuals are not what it's about.

It's about the fortunes and fates of two peoples. Of two kingdoms. David stands for his kingdom.

Goliath stands for his kingdom, his people. And the fate of the peoples hang in the balances in this conflict. If Goliath wins, then the Philistines rule.

If David wins, the Israelites rule. And so, David killed Goliath, as we know. We can skip over that.

Everyone knows that part. But not everyone, perhaps, has read the story far enough or has heard the story far enough to know what happened after that. After David beheaded Goliath and held up Goliath's head as a trophy, showing that he had won, the Philistines ran away.

They fled. Now, that wasn't the agreement. The agreement was that if Goliath falls dead, then the Philistines are the servants of Israel.

The Philistines, however, were not eager to make good on that agreement. And so, the Philistines fled in the opposite direction. What did Israel do? They followed them.

They pursued them. And they conquered them. It says in verse 51, And then David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it.

And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. Verse 52, Now, Goliath fell and in a sense the battle was over. The war was over.

Every day when Goliath stood challenging the Israelites, the issue was unresolved. No one knew, would the Philistines eventually conquer Israel or would Israel eventually conquer the Philistines? As long as Goliath stood there challenging but unchallenged and undefeated, no one knew how things would turn out. But as soon as Goliath fell, everyone knew how things had turned out.

The Philistines lost. The war was over. The Philistines were now, by their own agreement, by all rights, they were the slaves of Israel.

And there was no question about that. However, the Philistines were not willing slaves. They were not willing servants.

Therefore, the Israelites had to go and enforce the victory against the Philistines. Now, it was not a matter of the Israelites having to go and accomplish the victory. That was done.

The Philistines didn't even have the power to fight back. They were fleeing. They were running.

Their backs were turned to the Israelites. The war was over. It was simply a matter of the Israelites going to mop up to enforce what was already finished, to enforce what was accomplished.

Now, there's no question in my mind that this story is intended as a picture of Christ's victory over Satan. And in all points, it resembles that spiritual reality. Christ at the cross conquered the devil.

We read this in the scriptures more than one place. For example, in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 15. Colossians 2 verse 15 says, Having disarmed the principalities and powers, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

That it is the cross. Although some manuscripts say in him. Either way, it doesn't make any difference.

It's either in the cross or in Christ himself on the cross. Jesus triumphed over and disarmed and made a public display of his victory over the principalities and powers. It has been pointed out by many scholars that the Greek words that Paul used in this verse were borrowed from a common practice of the Romans.

When the Romans would go out to battle against some barbarians and conquer them. They would take captive the generals and the rulers of the conquered people. They'd bring them back as captives to Rome.

And they would then have a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. The emperor in honor of the conquering general would set up an arch of triumph. You can still see Titus' arch of triumph in Rome today.

Still standing because of his conquest over Jerusalem. But, interesting that God would allow that monument to remain significantly. But, it was common for the conquering general to have a parade when he came home.

With his captives in chains behind him. Led forth humiliated in a public spectacle for the

citizenry of Rome to see. Before the procession would run someone waving an incense burner.

This incense to the Romans represented the victory that they had. However, their captives could smell the incense too. And they were being led at the end of that parade was the place of their execution.

And so, the smell of the incense was to the victors the smell of victory. To the captives it was the smell of death. The apostle Paul says in another place where he uses the very same language.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 2 I mentioned Colossians 2.15 uses the language that's taken from these sermons. It says that Christ made a spectacle of them, a triumph over them. It's the same language as the Romans used of this triumphal march.

Well, Paul uses that same language in a passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 2. And, I've got to find it because I didn't know I was going to use it. It came to mind. But, I believe I'm in the right chapter.

Yes, verse 14. 2 Corinthians 2.14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. And through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place.

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma of death leading to death. To the other the aroma of life leading to life.

Now, do you recognize the imagery from the Roman triumphal march? Christ leads us forth in triumph. What's interesting about this is that most scholars believe that this doesn't mean that he leads us as those who are triumphing. But, we are the ones that he has triumphed over.

We are the conquered. We are the ones that Christ has already conquered. And, he's leading us as his conquered ones in his triumphal entry.

But, the wonderful thing is that we've been conquered from the power of darkness. But, now we're recruited as those who carry the knowledge of him to others. And, the fragrance of his victory is made known by us.

So, that just like the aroma of the incense was to the victors an aroma of victory. But, to the captives an aroma of death. So, also as we spread by the preaching of the gospel the aroma of the knowledge of Christ.

This aroma to those who are his enemies is an aroma of death. But, to those who have surrendered, those who are on his side, those who have been recruited into his army is an aroma of victory and of life, Paul says. Now, what is being said here is that Christ has

conquered his enemies.

Christ has disarmed principalities and powers. Well, that's handy to know since we are wrestling with demonic powers. It's handy to realize that they've been disarmed.

That makes it a little less scary, doesn't it? Especially in view of the fact that we are armed. We have armor. We have weapons.

What about our enemies? They're disarmed. This spiritual warfare stuff is not really scary once you realize the state of things. I mean, the devil depends a great deal on intimidation.

In my comic book on spiritual warfare, one way I depicted this is as a scene borrowed from The Wizard of Oz. You might remember how The Wizard of Oz, when Dorothy and her companions first came to him, they saw this big frightening face on a screen with flames and smoke and all kinds of imposing, intimidating voice and harsh speech and so forth. And then Toto the dog runs over and pulls his curtain back and here's this little wimpy guy at the controls projecting this picture up there.

He's not intimidating at all in real life. But he rules and terrorizes his subjects by intimidation. By giving the impression that he is far more imposing and more intimidating and more powerful than he really is.

And this is, I think, a very good picture of how Satan is today. His troops are disarmed. He is defeated.

He is, as it were, bound. And yet he keeps the world subject to himself by total deception. By total misinformation.

How does he do that? Well, we see it all around. First of all, one of the ways that he deceives Christians is by giving us the impression that the devil is a very scary fellow, very powerful too. A lot of movies that have come out about demon possession, whether it's The Exorcist or some others, certainly paint the picture of demons that are very resistant, very powerful, very much in the bargaining position.

Very much the ones who win in the end. There was a whole spate of movies back in the 70s that featured demon possession. And sometimes the good guys won.

Barely. But at times the movies ended with the demons clearly having the final word. And I know a lot of Christians got really scared of demons watching movies like The Exorcist.

Actually, The Exorcist, I guess, was a movie that was partially based on a true story. Obviously, when Hollywood gets their hands on true stories, they have to embellish them quite a bit to make them interesting. For some reason, they think so.

Actually, true stories are sometimes more interesting than Hollywood's version. But the fact of the matter is that movie had a profound impact on the consciousness of America. First of all, being aware of the phenomenon of demon possession, and also striking people with fear about it.

It was a terrifying movie, which I never saw, but I heard described. I saw some movies of the same type in the 70s, and they were pretty scary. You get the impression that the devil and demons are pretty scary characters.

You don't want to have any encounters with them. Well, the devil hopes you think that way, because he doesn't want any encounters with you either. If you're informed, his only hope is to keep you misinformed.

Because he has lost. His armies are disarmed. They are, in a sense, powerless against the truth to hold their ground.

And the only way he can hold ground is by keeping the world deceived about his loss, and the church deceived about it as well. Make the church think that they really can't take the territory. It's too well defended.

There's giants in the land. We can't conquer them. We're like grasshoppers in their sight, and in our own sight.

We're like grasshoppers compared to them, the Jews said. That was the problem, perhaps. Well, actually, there's nothing wrong with being like grasshoppers in your own sight.

In one sense, if you realize that you're like Adam and Super Grasshopper, or something like that. You are a grasshopper empowered by God, and God's bigger than the giant. Nothing wrong with having a low self-opinion.

Actually, it's a safe attitude to have. But you need to be like God. And to realize that a grasshopper with God on his side is bigger than a giant.

But the Jews did not want to go in and take the land that they were told to go in and take. Because they were intimidated by the size of the forces that they had to oppose. And Joshua and Caleb had an entirely different perspective.

They did not deny that they were like grasshoppers in comparison to these people. But their perspective was very much different, and certainly much more God-honoring. I don't know if I have it.

I might have it written in my notes somewhere here. A reference to Numbers chapter 14. When Joshua and Caleb spoke up.

If I can find this here. Yeah, okay, here we go. Start at verse 6, Numbers 14, 6. But

Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes.

And they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, The land we pass through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. In other words, it's to our advantage to go in there and take it. If the Lord delights in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey.

Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread. Their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.

Now that is a very good encouragement that applies to Christians in spiritual warfare. We are intimidated by an enemy whose defense has departed. Jesus said he was plundering the strongman's house because he had bound the strongman.

That's how he says it in Matthew 12. In the parallel in Luke it says he has taken away all of the strongman's armor in which he trusted. We've looked at that when we were talking about eschatology at an earlier time.

I believe it's... I hate to try to find scriptures on the fly here, because I don't have the reference written down, but here it is, Luke 11. This is the parallel statement to that which is in Matthew 12. In Matthew 12, Jesus said no one can enter a strongman's house and spoil his goods unless he first binds the strongman.

And then he will spoil his house. But in the parallel in Luke 11, verse 21, he says, When a strongman, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes, and that's Christ, upon him and overcomes him, which Jesus did against the devil, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils.

This is what Jesus said he had done to the enemy. He took away all the enemy's armor. That's what it says in Colossians 2.15. He disarmed principalities and powers.

That's what Jesus said. They're different from us. They're meat for us.

What business do we have being intimidated? Well, of course, we know that the demons, even if their defense is taken from them, some of the people who are influenced by demons still have strong weapons. Saddam Hussein is certainly one of those guys that his defense has not departed from him. What you were called as a missionary to Iraq, or Iran, or Saudi Arabia, where they don't seem to have lost their defenses yet, and yet they kill Christians in those countries.

Or China. Well, you see, if we're intimidated, it's only because we love our lives. You don't win that way.

You win by loving not your life, even unto death. But if the concern is for spiritual territory to be taken, spiritual victory, spiritual captives to be released, then there's nothing to be afraid of. We win.

In fact, it's already happened. Goliath is beheaded. He's armed.

The enemy is free. He will flee. He also says the demons believe and they tremble.

Resist the devil and he'll flee from you, is James 4.7. The demons believe and tremble is also in James. It's in James 2. I don't know the verse number. I can find it, don't I? The demons are trembling.

They flee when they are resisted. Verse 19. James 2.19. So we do not have a fearful, intimidating, dangerous enemy if we are informed.

Now, it is possible for the enemy to keep people enslaved and intimidated if they are not informed. That's why the truth is so essential in this battle. The devil's only hope is to keep the world and the church uninformed.

In other words, deceived. Deception is his only hope. I remember seeing a movie in the 70s put up by Walt Disney.

It was not a very good or well-made or anything, but it was, I forget what it was called, but it was about some Americans, I believe they were in some kind of amphibious airplane, and they were out over the ocean, I think the Pacific, South Pacific probably. And unbeknownst to them, they had, someone had left a transistor radio running near the instruments, and it kind of followed up the radar, and they got off track, and they didn't know they were off track, and they were looking for the fueling station on a certain island they were supposed to fuel up, but they realized they were way off track and didn't have fuel, and they had to emergency land. Fortunately for them, they saw a little island, looked uninhabited, and they had an emergency landing there.

Turned out the island was essentially uninhabited, except for the fact there were two Japanese generals there. Now the movie was supposed to have taken place in the 1980s, but these Japanese had been stationed there since World War II. In fact, they were just there to guard that post, and when the war ended and Japan lost, the Japanese powers that be had forgotten to inform these guys that the war was over.

And now, 40 years later or whatever, 30, 40 years later, they still thought it was wartime. And these Americans who landed there, crash landed or emergency landed there, were taken as captives. These Japanese thought they caught some of the enemy, they caught some Americans.

They didn't realize the war was over, and they lost. And it became a rather great disappointment to them when it was announced to them, when they found out that you

didn't capture the enemy. The enemy has captured you.

You've lost. You are not at war anymore. You are the losers.

The war is over. And because these men had not been informed, they thought that they could pull this off. And if the Americans had been equally uninformed, the Americans would have been taken captive and accepted it.

Well, I guess we're prisoners of war here. Never heard that the war was over. Never heard that they're not prisoners of war anymore.

Ignorance prevails. People can play like there's still war. The demons, if they keep the world in ignorance of Christ's victory, they can keep the same ignorant world subject to the intimidating rule of Satan.

And the message of the kingdom of God, the gospel that we proclaim to all nations, is that Christ is the king. Christ is the victor. Christ is overcome.

All authority in heaven and earth is now given to him, and all men are commanded to be his disciples and to do all things that he's commanded. When that information is taken, it frees captives, and the devil loses his advantage of deception and ignorance. And so the truth makes people free, and this is our battle.

In addition to making sure that the truth has its way in our lives, and that the truth supplants every area of darkness and error and blindness in our own lives, that we have the objective of carrying the truth forward and not being intimidated. When Joshua was told to go in and lead the children of Israel into the promised land, something that a generation earlier both Joshua and Caleb had failed to convince the people to do, now a generation later in Joshua chapter 1, Joshua is leading the people in that same mission. But he himself is encouraged repeatedly not to be intimidated by the enemy.

God says to him in Joshua chapter 1, verse 5, No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

Be strong and of good courage. For to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you.

Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

It is a command of God not to be afraid. God had promised Joshua the victory. Joshua himself, a generation earlier, had announced that the enemies he was now going to face, their defense had departed from him.

He was simply unable to convince the whole army to go with him. Now he had a more willing generation, and he was told, Don't get intimidated here. Be strong and courageous.

Be strong and courageous. Be strong and courageous. He is repeatedly told, He's got to meditate on the law of God.

Make sure he doesn't get deceived himself. Keep meditating on the word of God. Then you'll be prosperous in everything you do.

Christians' attitude has got to be one somewhat of aggression toward the enemy. Not only making sure that I don't get myself damaged in the battle spiritually, but make sure that I damage the enemy. That's a very important thing in spiritual warfare as in any warfare.

In Matthew chapter 11 and verse 12, Jesus said, From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. Now that verse has, you know, occasioned some curiosity and confusion at times. I've often been asked what that verse means, and not all agree as to what the answer to that question would be.

What does that verse mean? The kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. Well, I personally believe that it has two meanings. There's two clauses in that sentence, and I think they each have a different meaning.

The kingdom of God is taken by violence, or suffers violence, excuse me, is a reference to the fact that the enemies of the kingdom violently oppose it. John the Baptist was a good example. He had been arrested by Herod.

Herod was one of those principalities and powers, motivated by Satan, who was opposing the advance of the kingdom of God through John the Baptist and Jesus. And the kingdom was suffering violence at the hands of such men. But the second part, violent men take it by force, I believe is a reference to the Christian.

The Christian, because he will be opposed with violence, he must bring an attitude of equal violence or aggression to the task. In other words, a Christian must have an attitude of persistent aggression toward the enemy. This is the violence that I believe he's talking about.

We don't do physical violence to people, but we can do violent damage to the enemy. And it takes a determination equal to the determination of those who oppose it. The kingdom suffers at the hands of violent men, therefore the kingdom will be advanced by men of an equal violent nature, violent in the sense of doing spiritual damage to the enemy.

That the second clause about violent men take it by force is a reference to the Christian seems to be confirmed by the parallel statement in Luke. The parallel statement in Luke is in Luke 16, and verse 16, Luke 16, 16. He says, The law and the prophets were until John.

Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. Now, in the context, that appears to be the same statement, or at least a restatement of the same idea, to that which we read in Matthew 11, 12. But instead of saying violent men take it by force, he says men press into it.

That is, if you want to be in the kingdom, you need to press in. Why? Because there's resistance. The devil will do all he can to prevent you from acquiring the kingdom, and acquiring others for it, and advancing the kingdom in new territory.

This takes a pressing in. This takes a violence of determination. It requires that we be aggressive in the effort, that we not sit back content to let nations remain in darkness, and persons for whom Christ died to pass into a Christless eternity, when we could be doing something about it, and we are expected to.

That's what armies do. They go out and take the territory. They go out and free the captives that the enemy has taken.

This is what we're supposed to do. According to 2 Timothy 2, in 2 Timothy 2, it is clear that though we are spiritually aggressive, we are physically meek and gentle. Jesus was both.

He was a lamb to the human eye, but a lion to the heavenly eye. He was at once a conquering, victorious, aggressive lion in the spiritual realm, and a meek lamb in terms of his behavior among men, because spiritual aggression is not to be mistaken for physical aggression. Well, we have to be violent men in the spiritual sense, but what kind of people are we outwardly? Well, Paul said in 2 Timothy 2, verse 24, And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition.

If God perhaps will grant them repentance, that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. The bottom line here is helping people free themselves from the captivity of Satan. These people have been fallen into the snare of the devil.

They've been taken captive by him to do his will. These are the captives that must be set free. How are they? By the acknowledging of the truth.

That's what he says at the end of verse 25. So that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil. The truth is what makes them free.

But how do we see to it that they know the truth? Well, we come gently. We come with an aptness to teach, to correct those who are in opposition in a gentle manner, in a winsome way. While we are gently instructing others, and kindly and meekly teaching others the truth, that is a violent act in the spiritual realm.

That is tearing things from the grip of Satan. That is breaking open prison doors violently. The prison of the mind is being unlocked, and the prisoners are being ejected.

This is warfare stuff, but outwardly the believer is meek and gentle. That's why I'm not particularly into these spiritual warfare conferences where people dress up in army fatigues, and they act all military, and act all tough, and they rail at the devil, and they shout, and they try to put on an air of militance so that they kind of become convincingly scary to the devil. I don't think the devil is very scared by that kind of stuff.

The devil uses that all the time. In fact, the devil probably is gleeful when Christians lapse into the mistaken notion that physical or temperamental aggressiveness is somehow associated with spiritual victory. It is gentleness.

It is meekness. It is instructing in the truth. It is correcting those in opposition so that they might know the truth that sets the prisoners free.

This is, in the spiritual realm, a violent thing, but it is not done by behaving in a violent manner, so to speak, for Christians. It's really kind of a marvelous thing that we do more violence to the powers of darkness by being gentle with people, and yet this is something that represents an aggression toward the powers of darkness and an aggressive promotion of the kingdom of God. In 2 Corinthians 10, one of the better-known and most often quoted sections on spiritual warfare, 2 Corinthians 10, verses 4 and 5, Paul says, For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, that is, we don't fight in a carnal or worldly way.

Carnal literally means of the flesh. We don't employ fleshly methods and weapons. But our weapons are mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.

That sounds like a violent thing, pulling down a stronghold. In certain battles, when a city was besieged, the enemy outside would throw ropes up around the bulwarks and using mules, I suppose, and just lots of human strength, they'd just pull those towers down and cause that portion of the wall to collapse. Paul says that's essentially what we're involved in doing.

We're pulling down strongholds. My goodness, that doesn't sound like a very gentle thing to do. Sounds very aggressive, very militant.

Casting down, again, a rather violent imagery, throwing things down, arguments, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Now, once again, the bottom line of this long verse is bringing every thought into captivity of Jesus Christ. And while it is true that this verse is often applied to your need to bring your thoughts into captivity, I've heard many people quote this verse and try to make that as the principal point, that your thoughts, you need to get in control of your thoughts, you need to bring your thoughts into captivity to Christ.

That certainly is true, but I hope Christians don't have very much fighting to do to get that done. That's the beginning. That's the first thing, making sure you've got your armor on.

Once you've got your armor on, you go out and you fight the battle. And it is other men's thoughts that need to be brought into captivity. That's what making disciples means.

That's what persuading them to come in means. That's what teaching them to observe all things Christ commanded means. Bringing their thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

This is our aggressive warfare in the world. Now, it is conducted, actually, with outward gentleness of manner, but it amounts to a violent overthrow of the powers of darkness. Strongholds have to be cast down, pulled down.

Arguments that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God have to be overthrown. Captives have to be released. Every thought has to be brought into captivity of Jesus Christ.

Sounds like a heroic thing to do. But really, in one sense, Paul is just describing ordinary Christian life and using a metaphor of warfare for it. What are our weapons, after all? Preaching the word of God? Prayer? These are the primary ones.

There are others. These are the ones that most often are mentioned. These things are activities that a little old lady can do, or a little kid.

It doesn't seem like it takes big, strong, Rambo-type warriors to do this kind of stuff. A quadriplegic can preach the word and can pray and can tear down strongholds of the enemy. Now, in my understanding, the strongholds of Satan and the arguments and the high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, these things that our weapons pull down, are all areas of error and deception in the world.

Ideologies. Arguments against truth. High things that exalt themselves against the

knowledge of God, generally speaking, are deceptions that contrast with the knowledge of God.

Correct knowledge of the truth of God is the weapon, is the victory, to bring truth where there were strongholds of deception. Those ideologies, those strongholds, can be things like, you know, communist ideology, or secular humanist ideology, or new age ideology, Islam, cultic beliefs, or whatever. These things are truly strongholds.

They are not easy to bring down. But fortunately for us, Paul says, the weapons that God has given us are adequate to do the job. They are mighty in God to pull down these strongholds.

Now, I dare say that a lot of Christians simply do not believe that Islam can be toppled through prayer, through missionary activity. That the power of Islam, that that stronghold can come down. They don't believe it.

They don't believe that communism in China or in North Korea can be eradicated, notwithstanding the fact that we've seen that very thing happen in the Soviet Union in our lifetime. But Christians are very unbelieving about the effectiveness of these weapons. And I think that's a tragedy, because unbelief in the effectiveness of our spiritual weapons does not mean that we are left trusting in nothing, just because we don't trust in what God has given us doesn't mean we trust in nothing, it means we trust in the flesh.

And so we find Christians prepared to actually go to war and fight against Muslims, to fight against communists, to fight against whatever the enemy may be, physical enemies. Although the Bible says we don't wrestle against flesh and blood. Although the Bible says our weapons are not physical, they're not carnal.

But it's interesting that if we don't have confidence in the weapons God has given us, we will necessarily put confidence in something else. We have to have security. We have to trust in something.

And if it's not in the real thing, then there'll be some substitute. And it's a tragedy to me, it seems, that when God has told us to go and deliver the captives of the devil out of Islam, that we'd rather go and bomb them out and kill the captives. You know, we'd rather kill the Nazis, kill the communists.

I mean, some Christians would, because that's the only way that many Christians believe they can really stop that stronghold from spreading, that high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. The only way to stop it is kill them all and let God sort them out. Unfortunately, once God does sort them out, most of them get sorted into the hell category.

And that is not the objective. The objective of Christianity is not to annihilate Satan's

captives, but to free them. This is not done with physical weapons.

It is done with spiritual weapons. And if Christians had confidence, as Paul did, in the mightiness through God of the weapons we have and their adequacy to pull down strongholds, we would see more zeal on the part of Christians in employing these weapons. And we would probably, much sooner than we could imagine, see many of these strongholds come down.

What's amazing to me is that when the Soviet Union dissolved and the Iron Curtain came down between East and West Germany, that all of us were amazed. All of us were astonished. We were surprised.

None of us expected it to happen. And yet, how many Christians had prayed for just that kind of thing to happen? In fact, I'm convinced it happened for no other reason but that Christians prayed for it. I believe that the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe is nothing but the direct result of Christians' prayers.

And yet, when it happened, everybody was amazed. No one really expected it to happen. Sort of like the Christians who prayed when Peter was in prison in Acts chapter 12.

They prayed for his release, and when he got released, they didn't believe it. Couldn't be. Couldn't be him.

Must be his angel. No way he'd be out of prison. We're still praying for that.

But once in a while, God gives us a little bit of a humiliation and says, listen, I can answer your prayers even when you don't expect it. Now, maybe you can expect it next time. And I believe that God has shown us that the spiritual weapons that God has given us are mighty through God.

You know, when Reagan was in power here, they were trying to develop this thing called Star Wars, which was like satellites in space that were equipped with either laser beams or particle beams or something that could shoot down enemy missiles out of the air. Many people believe the Soviet Union fell because of Star Wars. Actually, Star Wars isn't there.

It was just something planned on. But many people say that because of the threat of the United States putting this satellite system in the air, that the Russians had to spend so much money on their own military that they just ran out of money and they had to collapse. Well, people can see it that way if you want.

Every time God answers prayer, every time God does something, it is done through some means or other. It's almost never done just as a flat-out miracle. It's usually because God manipulates this circumstance and that circumstance and all of them

conspire together to bring about the result that God wanted to bring about as a result of prayer.

But people can give credit if they want to, to Ronald Reagan or to Star Wars or to the U.S. power or whatever, but I personally think that God gave us this token, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, that which was the bastion, the principal threat to Christianity and to freedom in the free world, God gave us that little token to encourage us that this is just the beginning and that God has done this not because of what Ronald Reagan did or any other military or political person has done, this is done by God because Christians have been praying for decades that God would bring an end to communism and set the captives free, the prisoners of conscience and so forth, the suffering church there. Now that God's given us this little tidbit to encourage us, we should have, as it were, the taste of blood now, the smell of blood, and we should go after other targets. And by the way, it's not time to stop praying for Russia either, they've got serious problems as well, but the point is the doubts of the Christians about the effectiveness of their own resources has been rebuked by God by causing that system to fall.

God answered prayers even though Christians hardly expected him to. Now we are expected to expect him to, to pray more fervently, to go out more aggressively, to expect more success from God because Paul has told us our weapons are effective, they are mighty through God to pull down these strongholds. We just haven't believed it.

We say we believe in the Bible, but we just don't believe what it says. Christians believe the Bible, they just don't believe what it says. We all believe it's the word of God, right? Then I'm a believer in the Bible.

But don't ask me to believe what it says. And yet it does require us to believe what it says. Our weapons are mighty through God.

Now let me turn your attention just in closing here at this session to the old controversial and somewhat interesting issue of binding and loosing. Twice in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spoke of the disciples binding and loosing things. This language has been taken up by the spiritual warfare enthusiasts in the body of Christ to mean a certain thing.

It is sometimes taught that we as Christians can bind Satan, can bind demons. In fact, we are sometimes told that if we are going to take a city for God, we need to make sure we bind the territorial spirits that are over the city and so forth. This binding apparently is usually thought to be accomplished by saying something like, I bind you, Satan, or I bind you, demon, or I bind you.

And that this is what binding the enemy means. Well, if you ask where is the biblical support for binding demons, I'm not really sure that we have any direct scriptural support for that notion, but we might have indirect scriptural support for it. But that

doesn't necessarily mean that saying, I bind you, Satan, is what the Bible is discussing.

But there may in fact be some indirect support for the notion that we are here to bind the enemy, among other things. In Matthew 16 and verse 19, let's make it verses 18 and 19, Jesus said to Peter, I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Now that statement is made to Peter here.

Roman Catholics believe that this gave Peter primacy over the other apostles, and makes the successor of Peter in Rome the agent of God for binding and loosing and declaring normative doctrine and so forth. However, Jesus made a very similar statement to all the apostles in chapter 18 of Matthew. In Matthew 18, beginning at verse 15, it says, Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Now you can see that Matthew 18, 18 is exactly identical in wording to Matthew 16, 19. Both talk about the disciples loosing and binding things. I'm going to talk about the meaning of that verse in just a moment, but I also want to point out to you that in all of the Gospels, there are only two places that record Jesus ever using the word church, and these are these same two contexts.

The church, using that particular expression, ekklesia, in the Greek, only appears in two contexts in the teaching of Jesus, Matthew 16 and Matthew 18, in the exact immediate context of these statements about binding and loosing. In Matthew 16, Jesus said, Peter, I'm going to build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and you shall bind on earth and loose on earth. This is in connection with Jesus saying he's going to build his church.

In this passage in Matthew 18, the church is also mentioned. A recalcitrant offender who will not repent when rebuked once or twice is to be rebuked by the church, and if he will not hear the church, then he is to be excluded from the church, and in that connection he says, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. So it's interesting that both statements about binding and

loosing, and by the way, these are the only ones in the New Testament that talk about it, they're both in the only two places in the New Testament, or in the Gospels, I should say, where Jesus mentions the church.

Now, therefore, binding and loosing apparently has something to do with the church, at least in its immediate context. It also is a promise that is made to Peter, in one case, and to the apostles in the other. Whether it applies to all Christians or not is a matter for debate, I don't know.

But we can say this much, that the apostles were given an authority, which Jesus described as an authority to bind or loose, in matters concerning the church. In one case it was in connection with Jesus building his church, and in another case it was in terms of maintaining the purity of the church, and the church disciplining and excluding members that would not repent of their sin. But it has to do with the well-being of the church generally.

Now, what does binding and loosing mean? Well, no one is really 100% sure what Jesus meant when he used it, but it is commonly pointed out that in the teaching of the rabbis, which the disciples were quite familiar with the way the rabbis taught, the rabbis used these terms, binding and loosing. And binding was a term that referred to forbidding a certain kind of action. And loosing was a term the rabbis used for permitting a certain kind of action.

That is to say that the rabbis would sometimes have to make a decision about whether something was permitted by the law or not permitted by the law. Rabbis did not always agree with each other as to what was permitted. The fine points of what constitutes labor on the Sabbath, the fine points of what constitutes grounds for divorce, these are things the law was not exactly clear on, so the rabbis had their opinions and gave them.

Some of them had varying opinions. For example, a rabbi named Shammai only allowed people to divorce their wives if their wives had been adulterous. Another rabbi named Hillel said they could divorce their wives for any cause.

There is a sense in which the practice of divorce was loosed by Hillel, or allowed in other words, and forbidden or bound by Shammai. To permit a certain thing was to loose it, according to the rabbis. To loose people or to loose that behavior.

To forbid the behavior was to bind it. Now when Jesus said to the disciples that they will bind and they will loose, it may well be saying that they will have the authority in the church that the rabbis claimed in Israel, concerning what's permitted and what's not permitted. That would be agreeable with everything else we know about the apostles' authority in the early church.

We know that they were the ones who decided what the gospel was, what the gospel

was not. They had the Jerusalem council, the apostles had to get together and hash it out and make a decision. When they made a decision it was decided, it was determined.

They're the ones who determined who would be allowed in the church and on what terms. They carried an authority, they actually had the authority of Christ himself. And it is possible, probable even, that Jesus is using this typical rabbinic language in order to say the disciples will have the authority, the apostles and maybe others besides, I don't know, will have the authority to determine what is permitted and what is not permitted in the church.

To bind and to loose things, even as the rabbis themselves professed to have the authority to do. Now there's another thing to consider in these verses. In both cases, the way it reads in the New King James and in many of the translations, Jesus said, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. However, the tense of the verbs is different in the Greek in both places. In Matthew 16 and 18, actually what he says is, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven.

And whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven. Now that changes the meaning significantly. Anyone can confirm this from a look at the Greek New Testament, which is over there on the shelf, or the New American Standard, I think renders it correctly in the first place.

I think the NIV renders it similar to the King James, but then in a footnote I think acknowledges the real reading. The New King James has a marginal note at Matthew 16, 19, where it gives this, will have been bound in heaven, will have been loosed in heaven. So I mean, even the margins of most good translations will tell you that this is what it says in the Greek.

And it changes the meaning. If Jesus said, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, it might mean that the apostles could make decisions, and then heaven would respond by confirming them. If the apostles would bind something on earth, then heaven would agree to it, and say, okay, we'll bind that up here too.

But actually the way it reads is the opposite. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.

Meaning that heaven has already determined what things are bound and what things are loosed, and the apostles will on earth enforce that which is already a reality in heaven. Certain things have already been bound or loosed by God in heaven. The apostles' task was to bind and loose the same things on earth.

Whatever they bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven. Whatever they loose on earth will have already been loosed in heaven. Therefore they are not going out

doing things and heaven has to obey them.

It's the other way around. Certain realities already exist in heaven, and the disciples were to confirm and to enforce those realities. Now, these statements are in the context of church discipline and sin and church practice and so forth.

But we know this, that Jesus said that Satan has been bound, as it were, in heaven too. But people often ask us, those of us who believe Satan is bound, how then is he so active? Why is he getting away with so much if he's been bound? Well, he's been bound in heaven, as it were. But he needs to be bound on earth.

And this is a task for the church. The church, like the Israelites after David killed Goliath, had to go out and enforce the victory. The victory was accomplished, but it had to be enforced by obedient, aggressive action on the part of the good guys.

And while it is the case that Satan has been conquered, as it were, in heaven, yet the church's task is to go out and to enforce that on earth. Not necessarily by going out and saying, I bind you, Satan, I bind you, Satan. The Bible doesn't ever describe someone saying, I bind you, Satan.

But our very activity of preaching the gospel, our activity of prayer, our activity of warfare in general is an enforcing on earth of the victory of Christ already accomplished in heaven. In that sense, I do believe we bind the power of the enemy. I don't think that's the primary meaning of Jesus' statement, but I think the principle, he states, is that whatever has been bound in heaven, the church will bind on earth.

And that would include, although he may not have had this in view in the context, that would, to my mind, include Christ's victory over Satan, who has been led triumphantly as conquered and disarmed in the heavenlies. We are to enforce and bring to reality that victory on earth through our warfare. That is our commission.

We have to stop at this point, having run out of time, but we will continue to talk about spiritual warfare and some of the practical issues associated with it in the classes yet to come.