

MBC - 4/11/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
Spiritual Warfare - Pt.3
“God’s Sovereignty Over the Devil”

Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 6 this morning as we continue our study of this epistle and what the Holy Spirit say to God’s children about how we are to stand firm in our battle against Satan and his demons—

- Ephesians 6:10-17 ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

(pray)

A couple weeks ago we sang a song by Fernando Ortega, and the words keep playing in my head—

*Lord, we are weak and frail, helpless in the storm.
 Surround us with Your angels, hold us in Your arms.
 Our cold and ruthless enemy, his pleasure is our harm.
 Rise up, oh Lord, and he will flee,
 Before our Sovereign God!*

Amen? And let me tell you, Satan and His demons know that God is sovereign over them, even if many Christians don’t. I wanted to talk about the armor of God this morning, and I told you I would talk about demon possession, but there is something we need to have planted in our hearts and minds before we can deal with these things, and it’s this truth: God is King and Lord even over Satan. Whatever power Satan exerts over this world, he does so only by divine delegation. He has no more power than God allows. He holds sway only by divine permission and within divinely ordained limits. Satan is not ultimately sovereign. Only God is.

And we can go even further: *Satan and his demons actually serve God’s purposes! They are working for Him!*

Now a servant might serve through gritted teeth, and he might hate his master, but he’s still a servant. And the devil is God’s servant. He’s never done one thing out of love for God. He’s never done one thing to willingly bring glory to God. But in the end, everything the devil does will further the purposes of God and display the glory of God.

At the final Judgment, men and angels will see that the devil never won a single time. And that includes, in the Garden of Eden!

- Think back to our study in Matthew’s Gospel: it wasn’t just the wind and the waves and disease that submitted to Christ’s authority. In Mark 1:27, the people exclaimed, *“He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”* They had no choice!

They weren't just overwhelmed by His power, they were overruled by His authority. He is their Lord and their Master.

*Now you might say, "Why is this so important to know?" Oh, this gets right down to where we live our everyday lives. We need to know who is running this universe, don't we? And we need to know who has power over the circumstances in our lives. I've known dear Christian people who lived in constant fear of the devil: was he going to take one of their children? Some Christians will go through their house binding and casting the demons out of each room - I'm serious!

- I had a pastor call me a few years ago asking if I would join them in their crusade against the Harry Potter books! He and his wife believed Satan was using Harry Potter to lure young people into witchcraft. Some Christians seem to see the devil behind every tree.
- But maybe you're on your way to work and your car breaks down and you wonder: "Did the devil do this? Have I done something to give him power over me?"

Here is what I want you to leave with this morning: You don't need to wonder, "Now was that God or was that the devil?" Because it's always God, even if it's Satan, because God is God over Satan! And that is very, very good news.

This morning I'm going to show you 9 examples of God using Satan for His own purposes.

1. Job.

- Job 1:6-11 ⁶Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. ⁷The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ⁹Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

This scene reminds me of the Wizard of Oz, when Toto pulls the curtain back and they can see who is controlling everything in Oz. In Job, we get to peek behind the curtain to see God speaking with Satan—amazing. And God is in control, isn't He? Notice in v.7 that God is the one who initiated this conversation, not Satan. This entire situation was His idea for His purposes. God was the initiator of Job's suffering - not the devil.

But when Satan was able to speak, notice what the Accuser does: he charges that God's people only love and obey Him when things go their way, but they will turn their backs on Him in a minute when their circumstances change—even Job. He says the same to God about you and me!

- God says, "You're wrong. I will allow you to take your best shot at Job, but you can't touch him." So God gave Job into Satan's hands, and he killed all of his flocks, animals, and even all of his children. And Job still praised God. But notice that God limited what Satan could do.

So Satan came back again and said, “Sure, Job can live with all of that, but if *he* has to suffer physically, that will be the last you see of him!” God says, “Just don’t kill him.” Satan did everything short of that, and Job still didn’t curse God. Now remember that Job had no idea that the devil was involved in any of this - and God never told him! But see how Job responded to his situation—

- Job 1:21 ²¹And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. *The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*”

Job believed in God’s absolute sovereignty, didn’t he? That was his rock of confidence and comfort through His sufferings: “God is behind this, so it’s good!” And what was the upshot of this whole incident?

God displayed to Satan, his demons, and everyone who has ever read the book of Job, the mighty power of His grace in His children’s lives! They have a faith that doesn’t depend upon their circumstances. They might struggle with their faith, but they will never abandon it, because He holds them fast. So, “Though Satan should buffet, and trials should come, let this blessed assurance control: the Lord has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed His own blood for my soul - ‘It is well, it is well, with my soul!’” Job sang that song when the dust settled—

- James 5:11 . . . You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen *the purpose of the Lord*, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

In His amazing intelligence and sovereignty, God used the devil’s own heartless cruelty to perfectly accomplish “*the purpose of the Lord!*” Match goes to *God!* It always does. And you can know that God is just as sovereign over your suffering, even if He is using Satan in your life. His purpose is to show you “*how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*” You have nothing to be afraid of.

Someone else was tested by Satan for the same purpose, Someone more upright than Job, Someone without sin—

2. Jesus.

- Matthew 4:1 ¹Then Jesus was led up *by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

God the Holy Spirit did this! It was like a lamb being led into the presence of a dragon. Why? Because in order for Jesus to be qualified to be the Messiah, and our Savior, His character had to be *proven*. He couldn’t get off any easier than the rest of us, so God *used* Satan to demonstrate Jesus’ perfect obedience by testing Him, just the way He did with Job. Jesus had to succeed where Adam failed. The first Adam was in a lush garden, surrounded by food, with a perfect companion by his side when he gave in to Satan; the second Adam was alone in a harsh wilderness, with no food, but He resisted every temptation Satan put to Him.

- The result was that Jesus’ character was vindicated before men and angels, and now we say with confidence that we have a sympathetic High Priest who knows what it’s like to be tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin. How many times have you found comfort in this? And God used the devil to accomplish this.

3. Paul.

- 2 Corinthians 12:7-8 ⁷So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

Notice that two times Paul said that the purpose of this “thorn” was “to keep me from becoming conceited.” That’s was God’s purpose, wasn’t it? It certainly wasn’t Satan’s purpose to humble Paul - he would rather have kept him conceited! Paul knew two things: 1.) God was ultimately the one who gave him this thorn: “*a thorn was given me in the flesh.*” This was a Romans 8:28 thorn! But 2.) It was also a “*messenger of Satan to harass me!*” Whatever that thorn was - a physical affliction, or demonic oppression - God’s purpose was for Paul’s good, but Satan had a purpose also, and that was to harass and weaken Paul. Same thorn - two different purposes.

- And doesn’t this remind you of Gen.50:20 where Joseph told his brothers: you meant this for evil - God meant it for good!

So think about what was going on here: Satan did his worst to Paul, but even as he did so, he was only accomplishing God’s purpose. Satan’s aim was to torment Paul - and he succeeded! He caused him pain, that’s why he called this thing a thorn and prayed to have it removed. And by the way - Paul didn’t ‘bind’ Satan, he *prayed* to his sovereign God! He knew who was in charge. So in a way, Satan got his way with Paul, but in fact, Satan was playing into God’s hands the whole time. Because God is King.

And what purpose of God did the devil accomplish? Look at what this did to Paul—

- 2Co 12:9-10 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

God turned demonic affliction into a spiritual high point in Paul’s life, didn’t it? And how many times have you been strengthened by this same passage? God won—again.

4. Peter.

- Luk 22:31-32 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Now the “you” in v.31 is plural—Satan wanted to test all the Disciples, but the “you” in v.32 is singular. Jesus only gave him Peter. The word *sift* meant to shake violently. Satan wanted their faith to fail: just like Job, Jesus, and Paul - are you seeing a pattern?

Peter’s faith needed some work. Jesus knew that Peter’s pride could trip him up. He told Jesus in the next verse, “*Lord, I am ready to go both to prison and to death for You!*” He wasn’t “being strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” - he was leaning on his own strength. Jesus knew the temptation Peter was about to face: And He knew that Peter would fail 3 times, but because Jesus prayed for Peter, He also knew that he would turn back and be restored, and Peter would once again be the leader of his brothers after His resurrection.

Satan wanted to *destroy* Peter's faith, but Jesus wanted to *refine* it, like gold, through testing—Peter wrote about that later, didn't he? He wouldn't have been the same man if he hadn't gone through this fire. 1 and 2 Peter wouldn't be the same letters if he had gone through this testing. And if Jesus hadn't permitted Satan to sift Peter, we wouldn't have that touching scene on the beach in John 21 where Jesus loves and restores Peter.

And it's all because God used Satan for His own good and wise purposes. Beloved, Romans 8:28 includes whatever Satan throws at you and I as believers—never forget that! But let's shift gears now and I want you to see *how God also uses the devil for chastening and judgment*.

5. Saul.

Saul was the people's choice for King of Israel, tall, handsome, charismatic, he was a uniter—not a divider. And God put His Spirit on Saul to equip him to be the king, which doesn't mean that he was a regenerate man—that was just an anointing for a specific task. But even with that anointing, Saul was unwise, and ungodly. He disobeyed the clear command of God to exterminate the Amalekites, their king and their livestock—remember that story? So God determined to punish Saul and remove the crown from him and give it to David. Look at—

- 1Sa 16:14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit *from the LORD* terrorized him.

“*From the Lord!*” God sent a demon, and it wasn't to test Saul's faith, or refine it, it was for judgment. He handed Saul over to this demon, and it drove him to insanity—

- 1Sa 18:10-12 Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. [So Saul is having a rave party at his house, and David is providing the music. . .] Saul hurled the spear for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David escaped from his presence twice. Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.

Saul went from bad to worse. He almost executed his own son Jonathan for eating some honey; he tried to act like a priest, he slaughtered a whole group of priests because they had given aid to David; and he consulted a witch for counsel. He ended up committing suicide, which is consistent with being delivered over to Satan—it happened to another man who was handed over to Satan.

6. Judas.

Jesus called Judas “the son of perdition”—i.e., “the son of hell.” He was greedy, he was self-centered, but he fit in with the other disciples, so that they never suspected that he was routinely robbing their money bag. He did miracles like the other Disciples, he saw Jesus do His miracles, and He heard Jesus' teachings, but it never touched his heart. So Jesus finally pulled back His protection and His mercy from Judas, and turned him over to the one he was really serving—Satan. When Jesus was gathered with His men in the upper room the night He was crucified, we read this—

- John 13:21-27 ²¹After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, ²⁴so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of

whom he was speaking. ²⁵So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷Then after he had taken the morsel, *Satan entered into him.* Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.”

It’s ironic that Jesus told His men that they were to wait on the Holy Spirit, but Judas went out controlled by Satan himself. He betrayed his Master with a kiss. And then out of remorse—not repentance—he went out and did what? He hanged himself, and either the branch or the rope broke, his body fell on the rocks and his bowels gushed out. Satan is a destroyer.

What did Saul and Judas have in common? They were both uniquely blessed by being in the presence of God’s people, exposed to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, but they both rejected their spiritual privileges, and were removed from the place of God’s protection, and handed over to Satan for judgment on their evil hearts.

Let me show you a strange story about God using a demon to punish His own people for their unbelief—

7. Ahab.

God was furious with the false prophets because they lied to His people: they wouldn’t pronounce judgment as God wanted, they always preached, peace and prosperity. So God sent a bold, godly prophet named Micaiah to speak for Him—

- 1 Kings 22:19-22 ¹⁹And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; [This reminds you of the beginning of Job, doesn’t it?] ²⁰and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. ²¹Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ ²²And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’

Wow. This is amazing. God used a demon volunteer to speak through a false prophet promising Ahab victory so that he would go into battle and be killed!

Is God using Satan today to speak through the phony preachers who never mention repentance from sin, who only talk about prosperity and peace and love? Why would God do that? To separate true believers from false, and to heap damnation on those who love their lies. He’s done it before. And He will do it again right before Christ returns. Listen to this—

- 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 ⁹The coming of the lawless one (Antichrist) is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so *that* (here is God’s sovereign purpose) they may believe what is false, ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

8. The incestuous man in 1 Cor.5.

- **1Co 5:1** It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

A young man was having a sexual relationship with his step-mother. Paul said, even the pagans don't do that. And look how the church at Corinth was reacting—

- **1Co 5:2** You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

“Welcome to the 1st Church of Corinth where you can come as you are. We won't ask you to say anything, sing anything, or sign anything. Worried about that affair with your stepmother? Hey, we don't judge. We're the loving, tolerant church.”

Paul is much more upset at the church than he is with this man. They were lying about the Gospel of Jesus Christ saying that you can have Jesus and keep your sins—that's a lie. So Paul demands that they discipline this man, and we are assuming that the steps that Jesus gave in Matthew 18 were followed. But listen to Paul's words:

- **1Co 5:3-5** For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

What in the world is Paul saying here? He is saying, “This person has willingly chosen to live like the world rather than like a child of God, so put him out of the church into the world. Remove the blessing and protection of the church and let him experience the full effects of living in Satan's domain.”

And remember Satan doesn't just want to damn souls, he wants to destroy bodies so that he gets the soul before it can be saved! That's what Paul means by “*the destruction of his flesh*,” “Let Satan do his worst.” But his desire was that after being worked over by Satan, he would come to his senses and be brought to repentance. So handing this man over to Satan was an act of mercy - do you see that?

- Isn't this just what happened to the prodigal son? He turned his back on his father, his God, and his home. He ended up eating with the pigs—that's the bottom of the barrel for a Jewish boy! But that experience shocked him back into reality, repentance, and restoration. He went through hell, but it brought him back to his Father.

So we see it again, God uses Satan, the destroyer, to accomplish His purposes.

9. Hymenaeus and Alexander.

- **1Ti 1:18-20** This charge I entrust to you, [the charge to stop the false teachers] Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

These two men were probably elders in the church at Ephesus, and they were arrogantly misleading the sheep. That had drifted from sound teaching and had lost the rudder of a clear

conscience, so they had shipwrecked the faith. Paul means that they were apostates - they were never saved. We read about Hymenaeus again—

- 2Ti 2:17-18 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

By the way, this heresy is called “*full preterism*,” and it is still around today: a church over in Napa was teaching this nonsense. False teaching is an infection that spreads until it kills. So Paul made the decision: these men needed to be handed over to Satan, and he did that by having them put out of the church and into the world, through Timothy. The purpose here wasn’t restoration, like it was for the man in the Corinthian church. It was judgment on false teachers.

I want you to what this says to us about church membership: To be *in* the church is a place of protection from Satan, but to be put *out* of it is to be in his sphere of power. You don’t want to be out there - you want to be in here. But once again we see that Satan was only working for God.

So what does this mean to you and me this morning?

1.) If you are a Christian, you don’t ever need to ask if what is happening to you is God or Satan—it’s always God, even if He is using Satan to serve your sanctification. Satan might want to destroy you, but your Father *always* means it for good, and He is in control of the devil. You do not need to fear the devil—you fear God.

- But if you are a Christian who is not guarding your faith and keeping a clear conscience, you aren’t fearing God, and you need to realize that God might allow Satan to have his way with you for discipline; to the point of “*the destruction of your flesh*.” It happened to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, it happened to some Christians in Corinth who were sick, and some were dead because they abused the Lord’s Table. If you aren’t fearing God, then you should be afraid of Satan. You don’t know who you’re messing with.

2.) And if you are an unbeliever this morning, you are in Satan’s domain, and under his control. According to the Word of God you are “*following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*.” Romans 8:28 says that God causes all things to work together for good - but not for you. And what Satan can do to your body is nothing compared to what he will do to your body and soul for the rest of eternity unless you repent and come to Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul described your spiritual condition in—

- 2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

You are blind, and only God can overcome Satan and your bondage to him. Listen—

- 2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

If you call on the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, you will be saved; delivered from the domain of darkness, and transferred to His kingdom of light and life. Don't wait. Do that this morning!