

## **Supplement to Message Delivered on OBW, November 3, 2021**

### **Specific Contemporary Sins That Call for Repentance**

### **Who is Our Enemy?**

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12 KJV 1900)*

During this OBW session last night (November 3, 2021), I spoke from Jesus' message to the angel of the Church of Ephesus, Revelation 2:1-7. The panel asked me to focus on the question of "First love" and "First works," especially as these terms relate to contemporary Christians. They also asked me to address a related question. Historically, after seasons of persecution or trial, the church has experienced notable spiritual revival and ingathering. We've gone through a season of trial (I doubt that it has ended), but we see no spiritual revival or ingathering. Why? In the message I addressed the questions related to "First love" and "First works" and the question regarding revival. I offered my observation that, in this message, Jesus gravely warned the Ephesian Church to repent from leaving their first love, return to it and go back to doing their first work. He also warned the church; if they failed to repent in this manner, He would come quickly and remove their candlestick, His personal influence that gave them spiritual light, wisdom, and godly power to honor Him in their lives and in the church.

My thoughts for the message included two major related themes that I didn't have time to cover. I hope to cover those themes in brief articles over the next few weeks. The two themes are....

#### **1. God's Roadmap to our First Love and First Works.**

I listed four Biblical passages that provide devoted believers specific attitudes and behaviors necessary to realize the blessings of "First love" and "First works."

#### **2. Current Errors from Biblical Faith—First Love and First Works—that Require Repentance Before We See Revival.**

I introduced four specific sins that are common in today's Christian culture, but that contradict New Testament teaching. When the Lord's people face the New Testament's teaching, repent of presently forsaking those principles, believe, and accept it alone as their guide, the Lord's forgiveness is promised. However, as with His message to the Ephesian Church, failure to repent brings His grave judgment, "...or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5b)

In this "Special Edition" series, I hope to cover the specific sins of our day that contradict New Testament teaching and therefore require repentance first, followed by the Lord's "Roadmap" to point us back to our first love and first works.

#### **First Sin—Who is our Enemy?**

The New Testament often uses the analogy of warfare and soldiers to teach believers regarding our present life and how to deal with the many adversarial forces that we must overcome if we hope to realize the Lord's smiling approval and blessings in our lives. The dominant army of the first century was the Roman army.

Typically war was authorized or "Declared" by the Roman emperor and the Roman Senate. The enemy was clearly defined, and the leaders of the army lead their troops directly against this known enemy of the state. It would have been unimaginable for an individual Roman soldier to ignore this hierarchy, its orders and goals, and direct his weapons against any other individual or group of soldiers. He would likely have been executed for insubordination. He was under command with strict orders to obey his superiors.

If we apply this analogy to Paul's use of soldiers and weapons in Ephesians 6, our first questions must be a) Who is our enemy? 2) What is our battle strategy?

In the verse cited, Paul specifically identified the enemy against whom believers, first century Ephesians or believers today, are to direct their warfare. Who is our correct enemy? Paul provides full and clear explanation by which we may identify our true adversary.

First, Paul underscores who our adversary is not, "**flesh and blood.**" Believers, like the unbelievers in the world around them, are often much too caught up in the emotion of war. We see people with whom we may not fully agree regarding the hot button issue of the day, and we quite gladly join our unbelieving friends in open and carnal warfare against these people.

A leading "Hot button" issue in our day is the COVID virus, how serious it is/or is not, and how to effectively deal with it. Our culture is sadly polarized regarding this question. And believers have largely joined unbelievers in far more carnal than wise spiritual warfare over it. If we follow Paul's first qualification, we shall ensure that we do not pit ourselves against other people in dealing with this issue. "**For we wrestle not against flesh and blood.**"

If believers join the view that thinks the seriousness of the virus has been magnified, they will join unbelievers in their open hostility against Dr. Fauci. He is so despised that some fringe pseudo Christians have actually claimed that he is the anti-Christ. And the Christians who chose to join this carnal warfare will wax eloquent telling you all about Dr. Fauci's evils. Without question, he is their enemy. However, no one can deny that Dr. Fauci is "**flesh and blood.**"

Our country has become politically divided more deeply—and emotionally—in recent years than perhaps at any time since the Civil War. Nearly half the country heatedly opposes Donald Trump. And the other half equally and heatedly opposes Joe Biden. And Christians again join their unbelieving neighbors and wax hot and eloquent against their chosen adversary. However, would anyone question that both Trump and Biden are wholly "**Flesh and blood**"?

In these and other similar examples, the Christian community has abandoned its New Testament faith and blindly joined their unbelieving neighbors. New Testament faith categorically states, "**For we wrestle not against flesh and blood.**" But flesh and blood is the only adversary these folks openly and emotionally oppose.

We have failed to face the grave danger this errant choice of adversary imposes. As we increasingly justify and rationalize that ignoring spiritual wickedness in high places and fighting against flesh and blood is acceptable, we have slowly, but ever so surely started fighting the flesh and blood of our own brothers and sisters in the faith. In some cases, we have openly solicited other believers in church to join our carnal war against flesh and blood.

In this error, we have forgotten the real enemy that Paul directed us to oppose, and we have declared war against the very forces he told us is **not our adversary**, and against whom we are **not to "wrestle."**

Our true adversary, named by Paul in this verse, "**principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places,**" gleefully celebrates its victory. The very people who were commanded to fight against them in spiritual warfare have abandoned their post in that battle and are emotionally engaged in heated war against the wrong enemy. Satan could not be more pleased.

I must confess. During the last two years, I have struggled at times to avoid my own heated frustration at various leaders in the struggle against COVID. I need this lesson. And to the extent we have burned our emotional, moral, and spiritual energy against "**flesh and blood,**" we all need to repent, beg the Lord's merciful forgiveness, and abandon our forsaking of Him and His directions as our commanding General. What spiritual benefit might we have realized if we had kept our energy focused during the last two years against this "**spiritual wickedness in high places**"?

Interestingly, "**high places**" was translated from the same Greek word that appears in Ephesians 1:3, "**heavenly**". Paul warns us in our study passage. The chief enemy that Christians truly face and against whom they are commanded to engage in spiritual warfare is **an enemy who faces us in the same "Heavenly" place where we experience our richest blessings in Jesus.** (Ephesians 1:3) In fact Paul uses this same word several times in Ephesians, all with this emphasis. (Ephesians 1:3, 1:20, 2:6, 3:10, 4:8, and 6:12) All the time we ignore the "Captain of our salvation," and chase our favorite "Flesh and blood" wrong adversary, we neglect the greater enemy the Lord directed us to engage in the sanctuary of our deepest devotion to him. While we fight the wrong enemy, our true adversary has his way with us and with other believers who fall for lack of our personal spiritual presence and encouragement.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 provides us with specific details regarding our warfare. It occurs within our own minds, and the enemy we face works there to defeat us. The strongholds we must pull down hold a tight alliance with our own imagination, but the wise and loyal soldier of Jesus will follow His directions, engage the spiritual adversary within, and engage that adversary with the weapons and strategies the Lord, our "Commanding Officer," has specifically given us in Scripture, in Scripture alone. Our imagination, whatever ideas or strategies we chase on our own, anything outside of Scripture, is, according to this passage, the adversary we are to fight, not our brothers and sisters in the faith. "**...casting down imaginations.**" We can only cast down the imaginations that reside in our own mind. And that, my friends, is our greatest spiritual adversary. In both the Ephesians 6 passage and here in 2 Corinthians 10, the Spirit guided Paul to show us clearly our adversary and to teach us how to engage and defeat it.

In the face of growing citizen militia groups, committed to arming themselves in order to defend personal freedoms, it seems ironic that the church has forgotten that she is spiritually armed for an

entirely different battle. As the church, in response to various culture wars, increasingly turns to numerous battles ‘with flesh and blood’ rather than to the primary battle with ‘the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12), one must wonder if we have forgotten the teaching of the New Testament itself.<sup>159</sup>[1]

Armstrong wrote these words in 1997, decades before the COVID pandemic. You see, Satan has long realized brilliant success against the Lord’s people by deceiving them into fighting the wrong enemy, each other or other humans, “flesh and blood,” while he invades and wreaks confusion, chaos, and ultimate spiritual defeat against people who don’t even engage him in defense, because they are invested in fighting the wrong adversary.

The Lord has too carefully and clearly identified our true adversary in Scripture for us to ignore His commands and engage the wrong adversary.

If we regard Scripture—and **Scripture alone**—as our spiritual guide and light, once we realize this problem, our only godly choice is to follow Jesus’ instructions to the Ephesian Church.

*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. (Revelation 2:5 KJV 1900)*

Will you join me in falling before the Lord, repenting, and pleading with Him for merciful forgiveness? ***The altar of repentance has lots of open space.***

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<sup>159</sup> 159. John H. Armstrong, “How Shall We Wage Our Warfare?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 227. This is an excellent essay that refutes from Scripture many of the teachings of many modern deliverance ministries.

[1] Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Eph 6:12.