

December 19, 2021

“God’s Gift of Authority in Spiritual Conflict”
Colossians 2:6-15

FCF: Not appreciating the gift we have been given
PROPOSITION: (anchor) We are free from demonic domination
 (magnet) for we have authority in spiritual conflict.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes we can’t appreciate a gift we’ve been given - not because it’s thoughtless and lame but just because we simply can’t see it. It’s hidden from our sight. Case in point, prank gift boxes. Someone I know got a gift in a “Bathe&Brew” box. This was the labeling ([READ](#)):

A multitasker’s dream...Brew up some extra time before work...Now you can get caffeine clean...Simply hook up the Bathe&Brew to your existing water supply...Add one tablespoon of ground coffee per three minutes of shower time... While you shampoo, the Bathe&Brew makes free coffee at a rate of one cup per 12 gallons of shower water...Stainless housing stands up to even the harshest of dandruff shampoos.

The recipient was quite confused. Then amused. But initially, it was hard to appreciate the gift.

Why? Because he couldn’t see what it really was. That’s also true of the gifts God gives at Christmas. This is the fourth in a series of four. The first was justification. The second was sanctification. The third was the indwelling Spirit. The fourth is authority in spiritual conflict.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Colossians 2:6-15](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Be honest. How did it strike you when you heard this was the fourth of the four gifts? Surely some were surprised. Perhaps relieved you didn’t invite your friend. Or embarrassed that you did. But think with me. There is evil in this world that cannot be explained by psychology, sociology, biology, economics, or systems theory. Helpful as those fields are, this is too deep.

But Christmas forces us to consider this. What, after all, is going on in the account in Matthew 2 of the Slaughter of the Innocents and Herod’s desperate attempt to kill a rival? Was that just about one man’s pursuit of political power? There was far more going on than that in the streets of Bethlehem. What did we hear already? ([READ Ephesians 6:12](#)) And yet we often live as though Paul had said just the opposite. We need to own this and acknowledge our own sad tendency to downplay the existence of both angels and demons. Yes, we have heard or seen folks go to extremes here. And mentioning such things in polite company would feel strange.

But it won’t do to ignore this. Nor will it do to refuse this gift. “What gift?” you ask. Simply this. We are free from demonic domination for we have authority in spiritual conflict. That’s the gift. We are free from demonic domination for we have authority in spiritual conflict.

What is this authority and how does it play out? Let’s consider three things. First, what these demons are. Second, what Jesus has done. And then, third, what all this means for us.

I. WHAT THEY ARE

So, what are the devil and demons? Here we need to clear away some misconceptions.

A) Description

How are they described in Scripture, especially in terms of their origin and being?

1. Their origin

Demons are fallen angels. Satan is their leader. One could say there was a fall before the Fall.

2. Their being

So demons are creatures. Which means they are not eternal and uncreated. They are powerful but not all-powerful. They are spirits but neither omnipresent or omniscient. They have limits.

B) Purpose

1. What they want

What are they after? What do they want? Satan and his minions stand in opposition to God's good glorious purposes. They want the glory - all worship and praise, service and obedience.

2. Ways they go about it

What are the ways they go about this? What are their demonic strategies? Richard Lovelace points out five. First, temptation - luring us not only into incidental falls but ruinous paths. Second, deception - blinding us to the truth or fostering slippery counterfeits. Third, accusation - by the world and one another, sowing seeds of division. Fourth, possession - cases of control or "demonization" (more on this later). Fifth, physical attacks - bringing about psychological or neurological illness (not that demons are the exclusive cause but can still be a potential cause).

This is what the demons are - fallen angels bent on harm to God's people and purposes.

Application:

And on this point, we need to face reality. This is not the stuff of myth or fiction. The Bible is very clear here. We see this repeatedly in Jesus' teaching, His warnings, and His prayer - both what He taught and how He prayed. We need to face reality and let the Scriptures speak.

We need to let the Scriptures speak so as to correct our biases. Here are two examples. In the global South, the church tends to be dualistic, seeing God and Satan as two equal forces. But in the global North and West, the church tends to be dulled by the Enlightenment to the very existence of spiritual forces. Both these biases are problematic and need Scriptural correction.

Put another way, we need balance. We need to account for the influences of the world (all systemic rebellion), the flesh (our deep inclination to evil), and then the devil. We need to account for all three all the time. We need to face reality. Which prepares us for the good news of this gift. We are free from demonic domination for we have authority in spiritual conflict.

II. WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

Which then brings us to our text, what Jesus has done. Paul is encouraging his readers to put away false teaching and to know the resources they have in Christ (**READ Colossians 2:15**).

A) The Rich Imagery

This is rich imagery which would have deeply resonated with Paul's readers.

1. A military triumph

The picture is that of a Roman triumph. After a victory, the conquering general would ride through the streets of Rome in a war chariot drawn by four horses. Marching behind in chains was the defeated army as captives - the generals to be executed and soldiers to be sold as slaves.

2. The clear meaning

The meaning then is clear. Christ has been exalted and this is seen in His stripping Satan of his power. The devil and the demons have been defeated. And ours are now the spoils of war.

B) The Larger Witness

And this is hardly the only place we see this. Consider just some of the larger witness.

1. Promised from the beginning

This was promised from the very beginning in the Garden ([READ Genesis 3:15](#)). And it was a promise very well known ([READ Romans 16:20](#)). This is Jesus' mission ([READ 1 John 3:5, 8](#)).

2. Worked out in history

This is what Paul says in our text has happened with Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus speaks of this Himself. In Matthew 12, we read of taunts from the Pharisees, accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan. As He refutes this, Jesus says ([READ Matthew 12:29](#)). Jesus has broken into Satan's house, bound and constrained him, and begun to plunder his possessions. The point being that the cross was a decisive victory. And with Jesus' return will come a triumphal finish.

This is what Jesus has done and will surely bring about. Satan's doom is sure.

Application:

That, in the words of Gandalf the Grey, is an encouraging thought. This is what Paul is saying. And such words are meant to embolden and encourage us as we go forth into the world. Yes, our enemy is real and he has set himself against every aspect of the kingdom's coming. But Satan has been bound. His doom is sure. So, while he can rage, he cannot ultimately harm us.

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III. WHAT THIS MEANS

Which brings us to our third point. What does this mean? How does it connect to us?

A) Union with Christ

The key to that is our union with Christ, a recurring theme throughout Paul's writings.

1. Repetition

It comes out really strongly with the repetition in this passage. Look back again with me ([READ Colossians 2:6, 7a, 9, 10, 11a, 12a, 15](#)). Clearly this is vital. It is the very means of all blessing.

2. Explanation

So what does it mean? Disciples of Christ have been united to Christ, made one with Him. He stood in our place as our representative. The fruit of His saving work is then ours. Mysteriously but truly, we are bound to Him. This is an objective reality we need to subjectively lay hold of.

B) Dependence on Christ

Which then takes us from our union with Christ to our dependence on Christ.

1. Expectation of opposition

All the more so as we think of spiritual warfare. We should have an expectation of opposition. Satan knows all this and refuses to apply it. Which means his hostility and hatred are inevitable. He desires to sift us as wheat, just as with Peter. And as Peter later wrote ([READ 1 Peter 5:8-9](#)).

2. Assurance in opposition

We should have an expectation of opposition. But, at the same time, we should have assurance in opposition. The KJV “possession” is not quite correct. It should be “demonization” or “having a demon”. That can be on a spectrum. But for a Christian, we cannot be possessed. We can be influenced, tempted, accused, deceived, even oppressed. But never owned or controlled.

We belong to another ([READ Colossians 2:15](#)) As Luther said, the devil is God’s devil.

Illustration:

This is beautifully captured in a scene from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* ([READ](#)):

So I saw in my dream that he made haste and went forward, that if possible he might get lodging there. Now, before he had gone far, he entered into a very narrow passage, which was about a furlong off the porter’s lodge; and looking very narrowly before him as he went, he espied two lions in the way. Now, thought he, I see the dangers that Mistrust and Timorous were driven back by. (The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains.) Then he was afraid, and thought also himself to go back after them, for he thought nothing but death was before him. But the porter at the lodge, whose name is Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt as if he would go back, cried unto him, saying, "Is your strength so small?" Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for trial of faith where it is, and for discovery of those that had none. Keep in the midst of the path, no hurt shall come unto you.

Then I saw that he went on, trembling for fear of the lions, but taking good heed to the directions of the porter. He heard them roar, but they did him no harm. Then he clapped his hands, and went on till he came and stood before the gate where the porter was.

Application:

What are we to make of all this? What does it mean to engage in spiritual warfare? Think back to what we heard in Ephesians 6 or to the pattern of Jesus as He faced Satan in the wilderness. That is to be ours. Let me put it this way. Spiritual warfare is the broader umbrella which includes the everyday struggle to live a godly life - which is a struggle indeed in which prayer and dependance on the Holy Spirit are absolutely essential. Oh, how we need this gift! How we need to know we are one with Jesus and the implications of that wondrous union!

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CONCLUSION:

C. S. Lewis speaks to this in the preface to his book, *The Screwtape Letters* ([READ](#)):

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

That touches on this topic pretty well. But, as we wrap up this series, there is another quote from Lewis I wanted to share. Clearly tied to Christmas, it comes from his book *Miracles* ([READ](#)):

In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity...down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created.

But He goes down to come up again and bring the ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.

That's what we need - a great savior to bring about a great salvation. And it is what we have.

Because of Jesus, the guilty and condemned can be justified; those in bondage to sin can be sanctified; those who feel alone and abandoned can have the indwelling Spirit; and those who feel their powerlessness before the worst of our enemies can have authority in spiritual conflict. Every one of these are "in Christ" and critical for our flourishing. We have but to accept and receive them. They are truly God's very good gifts to us. We have but to receive and rejoice.

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