

Radical Protection - PART 1

Contending with cosmic forces

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Preaching passage:	Ephesians 6:10,12
Subject:	Why we need radical protection
Complement:	because we wrestle with supernatural forces opposed to God.
Exegetical idea:	We need radical protection because we wrestle against supernatural forces opposed to God.
Preaching idea:	In this great battle between good and evil, you will find your strength, your victory, in the Lord.
Purpose:	To help my hearers to see that they are in the midst of a great battle between good and evil and to encourage them to find their strength and victory in the Lord.

I will never forget the events of that evening—August 27, 1994. Our quiet Saturday evening get-together with some friends was interrupted by a phone call from our neighbor. He sounded agitated. “Derek, we’re having some trouble here at my house. Could you come over and pray with us?” Apparently, some students from the university had gathered at Steve and Laura’s home for an evening of fellowship. During a time of prayer, one of those students became very agitated and began to thrash around on the floor.

I paused to pray for spiritual protection for myself and also for my family. Those who remained at my house continued earnestly in prayer. Then I drove the half-mile to my neighbor’s house. When I entered Steve’s home, I sensed a spirit of confusion. Several people were gathered around a young lady who was lying on the family room carpet. She was tossing and turning. When I knelt at her feet to pray for her in Jesus’ name, she sat up and snarled at me, as if she wanted to rip my head off of my shoulders. Then a voice spoke in deep, raspy tones: “She opened her life to me!” I can still remember the goose bumps that instantly formed on my skin. I realized instantly that I was contending with cosmic forces, in the midst of an intense

spiritual battle.

Jesus was well acquainted with this kind of intense cosmic conflict. On one occasion when He was teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum, a man stood up and another voice spoke in deep raspy tones. The story is recorded in Mark 1:24. “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” Yes, Jesus was very aware during His ministry that He was contending with cosmic forces, He was in the midst of an intense spiritual battle.

At the very beginning of His ministry, an angel had appeared to Jesus while He was fasting and praying in the wilderness. Was this a holy angel sent from the courts of heaven or a fallen angel in rebellion against God? The words of this angel revealed his true identity. Matthew 4:3 “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” And again in Matthew 4:6, “If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down.” And finally in Matthew 4:9, having shown Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, “All these things I will give you if you fall down and worship me.”

An angel from the courts of heaven would have bowed down and worshipped Jesus, the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us. But this angel in the wilderness said “Bow down and worship me!” Now the battle lines were clearly drawn. This was not an angel from the courts of heaven. This was a fallen angel who was living in open rebellion against God. Jesus boldly responded, “Away with you, Satan!” Yes, Jesus knew that He was contending with cosmic forces who were opposed to God.

Satan’s rebellion did not begin during the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus. The book of Job also gives us some insight into this great cosmic battle between good and evil. Most Bible

scholars believe that the book of Job is the earliest book of the Hebrew Scriptures. Job lived in the land of Uz, perhaps around 2000 years before the earthly ministry of Jesus. A remarkable conversation is recorded at the beginning of the book of Job. Job 1:6. “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” Satan was not this heavenly being’s original name. Satan, Satanas in Hebrew, means “Opposer.” This angel lived in opposition to God. He opposed all that was good. Job 1:7 “And the LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” This was not a question that the LORD needed to ask. The LORD of heaven and earth knows all things. He declared through the prophet Isaiah, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:9-10) So when Satan appeared before the presence of LORD, his true identity and his rebellious activity were not hidden from the LORD. Rather, the LORD gave Satan an opportunity to identify himself to those present at this celestial gathering. If this had been angel loyal to God, he might have replied, “I come from the hand of my loving Creator.” But Satan answered the LORD and said, Job 1:7, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.” If Satan had been honest, rather than a liar and a deceiver, he would have said, “From going to and fro on the earth, causing pain and heartache and destruction.”

How did this rebellious angel, now called Satan, the Opposer, end up on planet earth? That question is answered in the book of Revelation. The mystery of the great cosmic conflict is revealed in vision to the apostle John. Revelation 12:7-8 “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon: and the dragon and his angels fought, but they

did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” Who is this dragon? That question is answered in Revelation 12:9. “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

How many of the heavenly angels joined with Satan in his open rebellion against God? We don't have an exact number, but Scripture records in Revelation 12:4 that the dragon's tail “drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.” Daniel speaks of ten thousand times ten thousand standing before the throne of God, literally a myriad of myriads, and one third of that number joined Satan in his open rebellion against God. Why would they do that? How was Satan able to convince one third of the angelic host to join him in rebellion against God? Perhaps we find part of the answer to that question in the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Satan was not always a blatant rebel. He was originally called Lucifer, light bearer. He stood in the presence of the LORD, in a position of great honor among the angelic host. But the seeds of rebellion began to spring up in his heart. Listen to this inspired testimony recorded in Isaiah 14:12-14. “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground. You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; (remember that he would take a third of those stars and cast them to the earth); I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.”

The prophet Ezekiel tells us that this covering cherub, this honored angel Lucifer, was perfect in all his ways from the day he was created until iniquity was found in him (Ezekiel

28:14-15). This is the same rebellious angel who would lead a third of the heavenly host in open rebellion against God, the same rebellious angel who will be cast to the earth, and his angels cast down with him, the same rebellious angel who will call Jesus in the wilderness to “bow down and worship me!”

You might ask, “What has all of this ancient history got to do with me?” That’s a good question, and the answer is vitally important. The great cosmic battle that began millennia ago still rages on planet earth. Satan and the angels that joined him in his open rebellion against God are still roaming to and fro on the earth. We live in the midst of that intense cosmic conflict, contending with cosmic forces, with spiritual hosts of wickedness, and that is why we must take the time to discover how we can find radical protection. In the next 4 presentations in this series on Radical Protection, we will be carefully examining a key passage of inspired Scripture—the last portion of the apostle Paul’s letter to Christians in Ephesus, Ephesians 6:10-20. We will discover the importance of choosing radical protection, we will learn about putting on defensive weapons and taking up a powerful sword; we will learn to pray in the Spirit at all times as we live in the midst of this intense cosmic conflict and contend with cosmic forces.

I want to begin our study of this key passage of Scripture by examining Ephesians 6:10 and 12. We have provided a scroll for you that records this key inspired teaching. I invite you to bring it with you for this entire series on Radical Protection. Let’s begin with verse 12. Ephesians 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

The apostle Paul clearly teaches that this intense cosmic battle affects all of us, every

single human being on planet earth. We will all have to contend with cosmic forces. We will all have to wrestle against spiritual hosts of wickedness. The Greek noun *παλη*, translated “wrestle” in the NKJV, “struggle” in the NIV, is only found one time in the entire New Testament—right here. What is the meaning of this Greek noun *παλη*? We can’t look at any other NT references because there aren’t any, so we have to go to classical Greek. The Greek noun *παλη* is used in classical Greek for wrestling contests but also for battle, hand-to-hand combat. This is not playful sports activity. This is intense hand-to-hand warfare. Whether we like it or not, we are in the midst of an intense cosmic conflict. We will have to contend with cosmic forces that are opposed to God.

Paul tells us that we will have to wrestle against principalities, that is a term that Jesus uses in reference to Satan, the principality or ruler of this world (John 14:30), we wrestle against powers, literally authorities, we wrestle against rulers of darkness of this age, literally world rulers of darkness, rulers with global dominion, and we wrestle against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, literally spiritual forces whose very essence is wickedness who operate in a super-terrestrial realm. It is clear that these forces in opposition to God are organized and superhuman.

The young lady who was lying on the carpet at my neighbor’s house felt the full intensity of that cosmic conflict. When a deep raspy voice used her vocal cords to utter “She opened her life to me,” that young lady cried out in her heart, “Oh God, I never thought it would come to this!” Two weeks earlier, she had become angry with God. Now I want to tell you something important today: God can handle your anger. He wants to hold you close to His heart of love even when you have a temper tantrum. But this young woman made a foolish mistake. In her

anger, she said to God, “Just leave me alone. Just get out of my life and leave me alone.” That was a foolish and dangerous demand. “Just get out of my life and leave me alone!” Now here she was, two weeks later, lying on the carpet, snarling like a wild animal, listening to a deep raspy voice declare, “She opened her life to me.”

Have you felt the intensity of this cosmic battle in your own life? Have you found yourself contending with cosmic forces, in hand-to-hand combat with spiritual hosts of wickedness? I have. I remember when I was about 8 years old. I came under an intense spiritual attack. I was lying in my bed, trying to sleep, when suddenly I felt the oppressive presence of evil. My grandmother had been involved in occult practices, and now I realize that Satan was trying to make a claim on my life. The weight on my chest was so heavy that I had trouble catching my next breath. Have you been there? Have you found yourself contending with cosmic forces who are opposed to God? What should we do at a moment like that? Give up and die? No. Yield to Satan’s power? No. Then what should we do when we come under intense spiritual attack? The answer is found at the beginning of our inspired testimony, Ephesians 6:10. “Finally, my brethren, my sisters, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

The battle is real. The cosmic conflict is intense. You will have to contend with cosmic forces opposed to God but you will find your strength, your victory, in the Lord. God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col 1:13). Hallelujah! **In this great battle between good and evil, you will find your strength, your victory, in the Lord.**

I thank God that I had been taught that important truth as a child. I thank God for

Christian parents, and Christian Bible teachers, and a wonderful Christian primary school teacher. I might have lost hope that night. I might have given up that night. But instead, I remembered that my strength, my victory is in the Lord. I cried out to Jesus that night. I claimed the promise given 3000 years before I was born, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify Me.” And almost 50 years later, here I am glorifying His name. Bless the LORD O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. I boldly testify today that in this great battle between good and evil, you can find your strength, your victory, in the Lord!

The apostle Paul, who wrote this important message about Radical Protection, had experienced in his own life that his strength, his victory was in the Lord. While preaching on the island of Cyprus, Paul was opposed by a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. This sorcerer tried to hinder the work of God through Paul’s life and testimony. But Paul knew that his strength, his victory was in the Lord. And so Paul confronted the sorcerer with these words: “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time” (Acts 13:10-11). Immediately, a dark mist fell upon this agent of Satan and he groped around in the darkness, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Paul knew what it was like to contend with cosmic forces and he had experienced first-hand that his strength and victory was in the Lord.

On another occasion, having survived a shipwreck off the coast of Malta by the direct intervention of God, Paul experienced another attack from the evil one. A viper fastened to his hand when he was collecting some sticks on the beach to make a fire. I was fascinated to

discover that there are no poisonous snakes on the island of Malta. So perhaps this viper had been washed ashore with the wreckage from the ship, or perhaps this was none other than that old serpent the Devil. Either way, this was clearly a Satanic attack on Paul's life. But Paul had learned that his strength, his victory was in the Lord, and so with a holy boldness he shook the viper off into the fire. That is where Satan, the Opposer, and all of his fallen angels will end up—in the fire. The book of Revelation describes a lake of fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. They will all end up in the fire, just like that viper on the island of Malta—not because God hates them, not because God is mean and vindictive, that is the lie that Satan tried to spread throughout the universe. No, Satan and his rebellious companions will end up in the fire because they refuse a relationship with the Author of life. Their rebellion has been exposed in all of its rawness and ugliness. They refuse to accept that they could find their strength, their victory in the Lord.

And so the cosmic conflict rages on planet earth. We are contending with cosmic forces, caught in the midst of an intense spiritual battle. This spiritual battle will intensify as we approach the time of Christ's return in glory because Satan knows that he has a short time (Revelation 12:12). Satan has gone out to make war with the remnant of God's people in the last days who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17). That is why this series on Radical Protection is so relevant for each one of us. We will discover the importance of choosing radical protection, we will learn to put on defensive weapons, we will learn how to take up the sword of the Spirit, we will learn how to pray in the Spirit. But right now you have the truth right that will set you free from Satan's vice grip. Your strength, your victory is in the Lord. For Jesus, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:21, is "far above all

principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” The battle is real. The conflict is intense, but do not give up in dismay. Do not be overwhelmed. Do not lose heart. **In this great battle between good and evil, you will find your strength, your victory, in the Lord.**