

A STUDY OF THE

Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary





Introduction, Part 3

In our last lecture, we saw Martin Luther bidding his family and friends farewell and entering the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt as a novice on July 17, 1505. Today, having just watched the doors of the monastery close behind him, we will return briefly to the days of his youth to seek the foundation for his later views on the Devil and his understanding of the nature of spiritual warfare. When he was hiding in the Wartburg Castle in Eisleben, he wrote, “I can tell you in this idle solitude there are a thousand battles with Satan. It is much easier to fight against the incarnate Devil – that is, against men – than against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places. Often I fall and am lifted again by God’s right hand.”



Introduction

In 1989, Dr. Jay Adams wrote a book entitled *The War Within: A Biblical Strategy for Spiritual Warfare* in which he expressed this concern: “You may be one of the growing number of new converts to Christianity to whom nothing has *ever* been said about this war. In many circles today the fact of Christian warfare is so seldom mentioned, and therefore so little known, that many (perhaps most) believers are unaware of it....Whatever the cause, it is clear that the church is asleep on the battlefield; she has laid down her arms unilaterally and has settled for an uneasy peace.” Ultimately, as David Powlison asserts, every Christian must answer the following questions: (1) What are we fighting? (2) How should we fight? and (3) What is the mode of warfare?



Introduction

It would be difficult to find a Christian who does not believe in spiritual warfare, but “a great deal of fiction, superstition, fantasy, nonsense, nuttiness, and downright heresy flourishes in the church under the guise of ‘spiritual warfare’ in our time” (Powlison).

The field of ‘spiritual warfare’ studies is vast, with leaders and authors from various branches of Christendom offering their ideas and experiences about how Christians are to wage war against the “schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). For our part today, we are interested in Luther’s understanding and presenting some concluding thoughts about what the Bible teaches about this battle.



The World of Spirits

“The legacy of Luther’s parental home entailed more than a proper respect for hard work and deep erudition; it included also the at once wondrous and scary world of spirits, Devil, and witchcraft, which the modern mind has come to call superstition. It is indeed not immediately clear what one should make of Luther’s account of 1533 (50 years old) in which he so confidently takes for granted the existence of witches and witchcraft. Yet this too is part of the historical record:”



The Account as Told by Martin Luther

“Doctor Martinus said a great deal about witchcraft, about asthma and hobgoblins, how once his mother was pestered so terribly by her neighbor, a witch, that she had to be exceedingly friendly and kind to her in order to appease her. The witch had cast a spell over the children so that they screamed as if they were close to death. And when a preacher merely admonished this neighbor in general words [without mentioning her by name], she bewitched him so as to make him die; there was no medicine that could help him. She had taken the soil on which he had walked, thrown it into the water, and bewitched him in this way, for without that soil he could not regain his health.”



Modern Treatments of Luther

“In all modern classroom and textbook treatments of Luther, the Devil is reduced to an abstraction: be he a figment of mind or time. Thus the Evil One, as a medieval remnant, can be exorcized from the core of Luther’s experience, life, and thought. But the sources are as stubborn as Hanna and cannot be silenced. To begin with, Luther’s mother cannot be held solely responsible for Luther’s realistic perception of the Devil’s machinations. Hans Luder thought exactly the same way, and so did the miners in Mansfeld, who, far away from the light of day, were even more exposed to the artifices of the infernal powers – spirits, demons, and hobgoblins – in the darkness of their mineshafts.”



Christ and the Devil Real to Luther

“Luther’s world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic war for mastery over Church and world. No one can evade involvement in this struggle. Even for the believer there is no refuge- neither monastery nor the seclusion of the wilderness offer him a chance for escape.”



Christ and the Devil Real to Luther

“The Devil is the omnipresent threat, and exactly for this reason the faithful need the proper weapons for survival. There is no way to grasp Luther’s milieu of experience and faith unless one has an acute sense of his view of Christian existence between God and the Devil: without a recognition of Satan’s power, belief in Christ is reduced to an idea about Christ – and Luther’s faith becomes a confused delusion in keeping with the tenor of his time.”



Lutherhaus in Wittenberg

Table Talk Notes Taken Between 1531 and 1544





Do Not Debate With Satan When Alone

“Almost every night when I wake up the devil is there and wants to dispute with me. I have come to this conclusion: When the argument that the Christian is without the law and above the law doesn’t help, I instantly chase him away with a fa**. The rogue wants to dispute about righteousness although he is himself a knave, for he kicked God out of heaven and crucified his Son. No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church and the ministry of the Word were instituted for this purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn’t help, the prayer of another will.”

Spring, 1533



How To Deal With Thoughts That Trouble You

“Now at my age, I’m not disturbed by such people (Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican scholar who originally prepared the charges of heresy against Luther). I have nothing to do with them. But the devil looks for me when I am at home in bed, and one or two devils constantly lie in wait for me. They are clever devils. If they can’t get anywhere in my heart, they grab my head and torment me there, and when that becomes useless, I’ll turn my behind upon them. That’s where they belong.”

April 6, 1533



Temptations in the Monastery and Elsewhere

“My adversaries have only annoyed me, but the devil is able to confront me with arguments. Often he has offered an argument of such weight that I didn’t know whether God exists or not. I shall now confess this to you so that you won’t believe him. When I was without the Word of God and was thinking about the Turks, the pope, the princes, etc., he came and struck against me with weapons. But when I have taken hold of the Scriptures I have won.”

Spring, 1533



Devil Upsets Distinction Between Law & Grace

“In a conflict with the devil, it isn’t enough to say, ‘This is the Word of God,’ for it is the devil’s greatest [trick] to take away one’s weapon when fear suddenly strikes. He has done this to me. He knows that in my heart I am constantly praying, ‘Our Father,’ etc., but he often harasses me about my not praying. The devil is the kind of spirit who won’t leave the weapon in a person’s hand if our Lord God steps out even for a moment. Accordingly one must pray constantly, ‘Father, help,’ etc. Nobody should fight with the devil unless he first prays, ‘Our Father.’ It is a remarkable thing. He is hostile to us. We don’t know a hundredth part of what he knows. He tempted Abraham, David, etc., and he knows how to get the upper hand.”

Summer or Fall, 1533



Satan: Murder and Falsehood

“The devil has two things with which he goes about his work. These are murder and falsehood [John 8:44]. God commanded ‘You shall not kill’ [Ex. 20:13] and ‘You shall have no other gods’ [Ex. 20:3]. Against these two commandments Satan is constantly acting. He may and can do nothing else than lie and murder.”

Before December 14, 1531



Story of the Devil Breaking Up a Marriage

“When I was a boy, the story was once told about Satan’s inability to start a quarrel between a man and his wife who loved each other deeply. He achieved his purpose through an old woman, who placed a sharp knife under the pillow of each of them. Then she told each [about the knife under the other’s pillow]. The man found the knife [under the wife’s pillow] and killed his wife. Then Satan approached the old woman and held out a pair of shoes to her on a long stick. When she asked why he didn’t come closer Satan replied, ‘You’re worse than I am, for you’ve done to the man and his wife what I couldn’t do.’ So we see that the devil is always hostile to whatever our Lord God does.”

Between April 7 and May 1, 1532



Consolation for a Depressed Friend

Weller said, “The devil is a master at taking hold of us where it hurts most.” Luther: “Yes, he doesn’t learn this from us. He is quite agile. If he hasn’t exempted the patriarchs, the prophets, and the prince of prophets, Christ, he will not spare us. He can make the oddest syllogisms: ‘You have sinned. God is angry with sinners. Therefore despair!’ Accordingly we must proceed from the law to the gospel and grasp the article concerning the forgiveness of sins. You are not the only one, dear brother, who suffers from such anguish.”

March 29, 1538



How to Deal with Specters and Poltergeists

“On April 5, a pastor came from the church in Süptitz, near Torgau, to complain of apparitions and disturbances caused by Satan. He said that Satan disturbed his peace with nocturnal tumults and the smashing of all the utensils in his house. Satan hurled pots and dishes close to his head, so that they broke in pieces, and Satan annoyed him by laughing outloud, although he saw nothing of him. For a whole year, the pastor said, he had endured these and many other trials, so that his wife and children wished to leave [the house].

Luther responded, ‘Dear Brother, be strong in the Lord and firm in your faith! Don’t give in to that robber! Suffer the outward things and the



How to Deal with Specters and Poltergeists

minor damage that comes from the breaking of pots, for it can't harm you in body and soul, as you have found, for the angel of the Lord is with you. Let Satan play with the pots. Meanwhile, pray to God with your wife and children [and say], 'Be off, Satan! I'm lord in this house, not you. By divine authority I'm head of this household, and I have a call from heaven to be pastor of this church. I have testimony from heaven and earth, and this is what I rely on. You enter this house as a thief and robber. You are a murderer and a scoundrel. Why don't you stay in heaven? Who invited you to come here?' In this way you should sing him his litany and his legend [who he is and what he has done] and let him play as long as he pleases."

April 5, 1538

The Power of the Word Against Satan

“God provided his church with audible preaching and visible sacraments. Satan resists this holy ministry in all earnestness, and he would like it to be eliminated altogether because by it alone is Satan overcome. The power of the oral Word is truly remarkable. To think that Satan, that proud spirit, may be put to flight and thrown into confusion by such a frail word on human lips!”

November 4, 1538



Christian Battling Apollyon
John Bunyan Statue, Bedford, England



Christians as Sheep in the Midst of Wolves

“Christ fights with the devil in a curious way – the devil with great numbers, cleverness, and steadfastness, and Christ with few people, with weakness, simplicity, and contempt – and yet Christ wins. So he wished us to be sheep and our adversaries to be wolves. But what an unequal contest to fight with ten or a hundred wolves! He sent twelve disciples into the world, twelve among so many wolves. I think it’s a remarkable war and a strange fight in which the sheep are killed and the wolves stay alive. But they’ll all go to ruin as a result, because God alone performs miracles. He’ll preserve his sheep in the midst of the wolves and he’ll crush the jaws of the wolves forever.”

Between May 21 and June 11, 1540

History as Spiritual Warfare: Six Premises

1. Human history is a drama of paradise (Garden of Eden), and then war.
2. War begins in Genesis 3 and continues throughout the rest of the Old and New Testaments.
3. Every person is involved in spiritual warfare.
4. Jesus Christ is the triumphant Deliverer and King.
5. We can experience deliverance from the power of Satan.
6. Warfare will end one day.

Satan's Primary Purposes

- To spoil and destroy God's work.
- To keep people from God.
- To draw Christians into sin.
- To accuse and trouble Christians after they have sinned.
- "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

The Impact of the Modern Age

- Demythologizes God and Satan.
- Promotes the material and social, not the spiritual dimension.
- Accusation that people who believe in the Devil are ignorant and naïve.
- Maintains that religion is an illusion and, therefore, irrelevant.
- In general, the world impacts Christians with its various worldviews.

The Nature of our Warfare

- Who will rule our hearts?
- Whose voice will we listen to?
- Whom will we believe?
- Whom will we trust for blessings?
- Whom will we obey?
- Will we prove to be obedient or disobedient?

The Armor of God

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- The Sandals of Readiness
- The Shield of Faith
- The Helmet of Salvation
- The Sword of the Spirit
- All-Prayer

