

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANGELOLOGY

The Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and the Spiritual Realm

UNIT 6: SPIRITUAL WARFARE — A SOBER, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Lesson 15

The Reality of Spiritual Warfare

The Battle That Every Believer Is In

Key Texts: Ephesians 6:10–20; 1 Peter 5:8–9; James 4:7; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5; 1 John 4:4

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 6:12, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Unit 6 opens the final major section of the Angelology series: Spiritual Warfare, A Sober, Biblical Theology. The preceding units have built the theological foundation that makes this unit possible: the nature and ministry of the holy angels (Units 1–3), the fall of Satan and the demonic realm (Units 4–5), and the Christological triumph over every demonic power accomplished at the cross (the governing theological conclusion of Units 4 and 5 combined). With all of that in place, the series can now address the question that has been implicit in every preceding lesson: what does all of this mean for the life of the believer and the ministry of the church in the present age? How does the theological understanding of the spiritual realm shape the way God’s people live, pray, worship, and engage the world?

The answer to that question is what the Reformed tradition has always called spiritual warfare, not the dramatic, sensationalist, binding-and-rebuking theater of the charismatic spiritual warfare movement, and not the comfortable neglect of the secular-minded congregation that has forgotten that the Christian life is set in a cosmic conflict. Spiritual warfare, in its biblical register, is the comprehensive engagement of the whole person and the whole community of faith with the triple opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, an opposition that is real, organized, and relentless, and that requires the specific provisions the God of the armor has made available. It is the battleground life, the sober-alert-resistant life, the life that the New Testament consistently calls the church to live.

This lesson establishes the foundational reality and the proper character of that warfare. It is not the most dramatic lesson in the series, it does not feature demonic possession narratives or apocalyptic throne-room visions or the binding of the strong man. It is, in some respects, the most practically significant lesson in the series, because it is the lesson that most directly translates the preceding theology into the actual lived experience of the congregation. The doctrine of the demonic realm is not an end in itself; it is the preparatory work for a way of life. And this lesson describes what that way of life looks like: sober, alert, equipped, grounded in Christ, resistant without being obsessed, vigilant without being anxious, confident without being complacent.

The methodological commitment of this lesson, and of Unit 6 as a whole, is the sober middle path that the series has consistently modeled from its opening lesson: neither the dismissal that renders the believer unarmed, nor the obsession that gives the adversary more attention than the Scripture warrants. The biblical testimony about spiritual warfare is precise, comprehensive, and deeply pastoral; the lesson aims to receive it with the same precision, comprehensiveness, and pastoral care with which the Scripture offers it.

I. The Reality Declared: Ephesians 6:12

The Foundational Apostolic Statement on the Nature and Scope of Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:12 is the most direct and comprehensive New Testament statement of the reality of spiritual warfare: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (NASB 1995). The verse occurs within the great armor passage (6:10–18), and its function within that passage is crucial: it provides the doctrinal grounding for the command to put on the full armor of God. The armor is not optional spiritual equipment for the especially devout; it is the necessary provision for a conflict that every believer is engaged in whether they know it or not. The armor is necessary because the enemy is real, specific, organized, and powerful. Paul is not issuing an invitation to an optional program of advanced spiritual formation; he is describing the actual condition of every person who belongs to Christ.

The specific vocabulary of verse 12 is significant and has been examined in detail in earlier lessons of this series. The “rulers” (*archas*), “powers” (*exousias*), “world forces of this darkness” (*kosmokratoras tou skotous toutou*), and “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*pneumatika tēs ponērias en tois epouraniois*) are the hierarchically organized ranks of the demonic realm, described with the same vocabulary Paul uses in Colossians 1:16 and Ephesians 1:21 for the angelic (and by extension demonic) hierarchy. The repetition of the vocabulary from the Christological supremacy passage of Ephesians 1:21 is theologically significant: the same powers over which Christ has been seated “far above” in Ephesians 1:21 are the powers against which the believer struggles in Ephesians 6:12. The believer’s struggle is against powers that have already been placed under the feet of the One in whom the believer stands. The conflict is real; the outcome is certain.

The phrase “not against flesh and blood” is as important as what follows it. Paul is not saying that human beings are never the instruments of spiritual opposition, they frequently are; the history of Christian persecution and the daily experience of opposition to the gospel in social, cultural, and institutional forms makes that clear. He is saying that the deepest and most fundamental level of the opposition is not human but spiritual, that behind the human opposition to the gospel and to the life of Christ’s people stands a spiritual reality that human analysis and human strategy alone cannot adequately address. The congregation that reduces every conflict to a human-political problem has missed the deepest level of what is actually at stake. The congregation that reduces every conflict to a purely spiritual problem and ignores the human-political level has made the opposite error. Both human and spiritual dimensions are real; the point of verse 12 is that the spiritual dimension is ultimate, which means that the response must include spiritual resources if it is to be adequate.

II. The Three Enemies: World, Flesh, and Devil

The Classic Tripartite Analysis of Spiritual Opposition to the Believer

A. The World

The Reformed catechetical tradition has consistently organized the sources of spiritual opposition under three headings: the world (kosmos), the flesh (sarx), and the devil (diabolos and his demonic forces). These are not three separate and isolated enemies; they are three dimensions of a single comprehensive opposition that is mutually reinforcing and constantly interacting. Understanding each dimension in its own right, and then understanding how they interact, is essential for the kind of discerning spiritual warfare that the New Testament commends.

The “world” in its New Testament theological sense (John 15:18–19; 1 John 2:15–17; 5:19) is not the created order, which God made and pronounced very good. It is the organized system of values, assumptions, priorities, and social arrangements that the fallen human race, under the governance of the prince of this world, has constructed in opposition to the knowledge of God and the claims of His kingdom. “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15–16, NASB 1995). The world in this sense is the cultural, social, and intellectual environment that shapes the imagination, the desires, and the values of those who inhabit it, and it is under the governance of the adversary (1 John 5:19: “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”).

B. The Flesh

The “flesh” (Greek: sarx) in Paul’s theological vocabulary refers not to the physical body but to the fallen human nature, the indwelling principle of sin that remains in the believer after regeneration and that inclines toward everything God prohibits. “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (Galatians 5:17, NASB 1995). The flesh is an internal enemy, it is not external to the believer but resides within him, exploiting the specific weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and desires of his particular fallen humanity. The demonic realm exploits the flesh; the world shapes and reinforces the flesh; but the flesh has its own independent contribution to spiritual opposition that neither the world nor the devil fully accounts for.

The interaction of the three enemies is the key to understanding the comprehensive character of the spiritual opposition the believer faces. The adversary exploits the specific inclinations of the flesh to produce specific patterns of temptation; the world reinforces those inclinations by creating a social and cultural environment in which the flesh’s desires appear normal, reasonable, and even virtuous; and the flesh’s capitulation to those reinforced inclinations constitutes the specific sins through which the adversary’s purposes are advanced. The believer who understands this triple dynamic is equipped to identify the specific forms of the opposition he faces and to deploy the specific resources the New Testament provides for each: the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2) against the world; the putting to

death of the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13) against the flesh; and the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–18) against the devil.

C. *The Devil*

The devil's specific contribution to the spiritual opposition of the believer has been the subject of Units 4 and 5 of this series in its entirety. His intelligence, his organization, his specific methods of temptation and deception and accusation and affliction, his comprehensive hostility to God and to everything that belongs to God, all of this has been established from the biblical testimony. What the tripartite analysis adds to that portrait is the recognition of the devil's specific role within the comprehensive triple opposition: he is the external, personal, spiritual adversary whose activity amplifies and exploits the other two forms of opposition, directing the world system in his capacity as its prince and exploiting the flesh's inclinations through the specific tactical intelligence of a being who has been studying the patterns of human capitulation for the entirety of human history.

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness." Ephesians 6:12, NASB 1995

III. Spiritual Warfare Is Real: The Battleground Life

The Christian Life Is Not a Playground but a Battleground

One of the most important pastoral commitments of this lesson is the insistence that spiritual warfare is genuinely, really, concretely real, not a metaphor for the psychological challenges of the Christian life, not a colorful ancient way of describing moral struggles that modern psychology now understands better, not an optional engagement for those who choose to take the spiritual realm seriously. The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground. This is not a frightening claim; it is a clarifying one. The believer who does not know that he is in a battle is the most vulnerable believer of all, not because the adversary has been driven off by his ignorance but because his ignorance has left him unarmed and inattentive in a conflict that is fully underway whether he knows it or not.

The evidence for the genuine reality of the spiritual conflict is woven through the entire New Testament. Peter describes the adversary as "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8), a predator actively hunting its prey, not a metaphor for the difficulty of the moral life. Paul describes the conflict against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12) in terms that demand the full armor of God, a provision that would be grotesquely excessive for a merely metaphorical conflict. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus as having become incarnate "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14, NASB 1995), a statement whose Christological weight is inseparable from the reality of the one whose power is rendered powerless. And John describes the entire world as lying "in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), a description of the actual condition of the fallen world, not a dramatic rhetorical exaggeration.

The practical implication of the battleground reality is the specific posture that the New Testament consistently commends: sobriety, alertness, and faith-grounded resistance. “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Peter 5:8–9, NASB 1995). The command is not to be afraid; it is to be sober and alert. The command is not to engage in dramatic confrontational warfare; it is to resist, firm in faith. The command is not issued to a spiritual elite; it is issued to the whole community of God’s people across the world (“the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world”, v. 9). Spiritual warfare is the universal condition of every believer in the world; the posture it requires is the universal calling of the entire church.

IV. Spiritual Warfare Is Not What Popular Culture Portrays

Separating the Biblical Reality from Its Popular Distortions

A. What Spiritual Warfare Is Not

Before describing what spiritual warfare is, in the biblical sense, it is pastorally essential to describe what it is not, specifically what the popular portrayal of spiritual warfare in the charismatic and New Apostolic Reformation traditions has made of it, and why that portrayal is both exegetically indefensible and pastorally harmful. In the popular portrayal, spiritual warfare is primarily about dramatic, direct confrontational engagement with specific demonic beings: binding territorial spirits by name, rebuking specific demons over geographic regions, engaging in extended prayer marathons designed to overcome demonic resistance to gospel advance, and employing specialized protocols for the identification and expulsion of demonic presences from specific locations or persons. These practices are presented, in the SLSW tradition, as the primary means by which the gospel advances in the world, as if the primary obstacle to gospel advance were not the hardness of human hearts but the specific territorial spirits whose binding must precede effective evangelism.

The problems with this portrayal are both exegetical and practical. Exegetically, there is no New Testament passage that commands believers to engage in direct confrontational warfare with named demonic spirits as the primary strategy of gospel advance. The armor of God passage (Ephesians 6:10–18) does not include as a piece of armor the binding of territorial spirits; it includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. The spiritual conflict Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (NASB 1995), involves the demolition of “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” and the taking “captive of every thought to the obedience of Christ”: the primarily intellectual and moral conflict of bringing human minds into conformity with the gospel. This is not the language of dramatic demonic confrontation; it is the language of gospel proclamation, doctrinal clarity, and the transformation of the mind.

B. What Spiritual Warfare Actually Is

Spiritual warfare, in its biblical presentation, is the comprehensive engagement of the whole person with the triple opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, using the specific resources that God has provided for each form of opposition. It is primarily about standing firm in the truth against the lies of the adversary; resisting temptation through the provisions of the Spirit; protecting the mind from the deceptions that the demonic realm sponsors through false teaching; maintaining the community of faith as a context of mutual accountability and encouragement; and praying with the persistent, Spirit-directed prayer that Paul describes in Ephesians 6:18–20. None of this is dramatic in the sensationalist sense; all of it is deeply consequential in the ultimate sense. The congregation that consistently inhabits the armor of God, that is saturated in the Word, grounded in prayer, living in the righteousness of Christ, and walking in the peace of the gospel, is the congregation most effectively engaged in the spiritual conflict, even if it never conducts a single session of territorial spirit binding.

This is not a counsel of passivity or indifference to the spiritual realm. It is a counsel of proper, apostolically-grounded engagement. The great missionaries of the Reformed tradition, from William Carey to Hudson Taylor to Adoniram Judson, advanced the gospel into territories where the demonic realm was deeply entrenched in false religion, idol worship, and cultural bondage, not through territorial spirit identification and binding but through the preaching of the Word, intercessory prayer, and the patient, persistent, costly proclamation of the gospel of grace. The advance of the kingdom through the ordinary means of grace is not the absence of spiritual warfare; it is spiritual warfare conducted with the weapons the apostles prescribed and the posture the New Testament commends.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” 2 Corinthians 10:4, NASB 1995

V. The Reformed Understanding: Ordinary Means as Warfare

The Primary Weapons of Spiritual Warfare Are the Ordinary Means of Grace

The Reformed tradition’s most distinctive contribution to the theology of spiritual warfare is its insistence that the primary weapons of the conflict are the ordinary means of grace: the Word of God, prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the fellowship of the church. These are not the weapons of spiritual warfare because the Reformed tradition wishes to domesticate the conflict or to reduce its supernatural dimension to something more culturally manageable. They are the weapons of spiritual warfare because they are the weapons the apostles prescribed, the weapons Jesus wielded in the wilderness, and the weapons the entire New Testament designates as the primary instruments through which God advances His kingdom, protects His people, and overcomes the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Word of God is identified in Ephesians 6:17 as “the sword of the Spirit”, the only explicitly offensive weapon in the entire armor, and it is the weapon Jesus used in His direct confrontation with the adversary in the wilderness (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10: “It is written... It is written... It is written”). The consistent, saturating engagement with the Scripture, through reading, hearing, study, meditation, and memorization, is not a

devotional supplement to the spiritual conflict; it is its primary weapon. The believer who is deeply saturated in the Word is the believer best equipped to recognize and resist the adversary's deceptions, to answer temptation with the truth, to stand firm against the accusations that the adversary brings against the soul, and to proclaim the gospel that is the divinely powerful instrument for the destruction of the strongholds of unbelief.

Prayer is identified in Ephesians 6:18–20 not as one piece of armor among others but as the atmosphere within which the entire armor is worn and the entire battle is fought: “with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (NASB 1995). The “all prayer... at all times... for all the saints” is the universal, continuous, Spirit-directed intercession of the entire community of faith, not the specialized prayer of a designated prayer warrior team but the corporate, communal, persistent prayer life of the whole body. The congregation that prays is the congregation engaged in the most fundamental form of spiritual warfare available to it, not because prayer works by some mystical mechanism of binding demonic beings but because prayer is the specific means by which the community of faith expresses its dependence on the God who holds the leash and whose sovereign purposes govern the entire conflict.

The sacraments and the fellowship of the church function as means of grace in the spiritual conflict in ways that are less immediately visible but no less real. The Lord's Supper proclaims the Lord's death, the very death that accomplished the disarming of every demonic power, and thereby renews the community's confidence in the victory that grounds all subsequent resistance. Baptism marks the believer as one who has been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of light, and that mark is itself a claim that the adversary must reckon with. And the fellowship of the church, the mutual encouragement, accountability, and intercession of the community of faith, is the specific form of the communal solidarity against which the adversary's strategy of isolation and individualization is most directly countered.

VI. Fighting from Victory: The Believer's Position in Christ

We Stand in an Accomplished Triumph, Not Striving Toward an Uncertain One

One of the most practically transformative truths in the entire theology of spiritual warfare is the one that the series has been building toward since its treatment of the cross in Unit 4: the believer does not fight for victory; the believer fights from victory. The distinction is not merely rhetorical; it is the theological description of the actual position of every person who belongs to Christ in relation to the demonic realm. Christ has already defeated Satan at the cross (Colossians 2:15). Christ has already rendered powerless the one who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). Christ has already been seated “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21). And the believer who is “in Christ”, who is united to the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord by faith, stands in that accomplished position. The spiritual conflict is real; the outcome is not in doubt.

This truth, that the believer fights from victory, is not complacency. It is not the denial of the genuine danger of the spiritual conflict or the minimization of the genuine power of the adversary within his permitted limits. It is the insistence that the believer enters the conflict from the position of one whose Lord has already won, whose resources are the resources of the Victor, and whose ultimate outcome is secured by the same cross that accomplished the adversary's defeat. The difference between fighting for victory and fighting from victory is the difference between the anxiety of those who do not know how the story ends and the confidence of those who do. The former produces the desperate spiritual warfare of those who feel that the outcome depends on the intensity or correctness of their own engagement; the latter produces the sober, alert, persistent, faith-grounded resistance of those who know that they are implementing a victory already secured by another.

Paul's great doxological declaration in Romans 8:37–39 captures this truth with extraordinary force: "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NASB 1995). The "principalities" and "powers" in this passage are the demonic powers that have been the subject of this series, and Paul's declaration is that none of them, singly or collectively, can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ. The conflict is real; the adversary is active; and the love of God in Christ is the impenetrable, unconquerable, comprehensive security of every person who belongs to Him. Stand there. Fight from there. That is the theological position of the believer in spiritual warfare.

"In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that... neither... principalities, nor... powers... will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:37–39, NASB 1995

VII. The Sober Middle Path: Alert Without Obsession

The Pastoral Balance the New Testament Consistently Commends

The governing pastoral challenge of the entire Unit 6 is the maintenance of the sober middle path that the New Testament charts between two equally dangerous errors. The first error is the underestimation that produces complacency: the practically naturalistic stance of the congregation that has forgotten or dismissed the reality of the spiritual conflict and lives as though the Christian life were simply a matter of moral effort and spiritual growth within a purely natural order. This congregation is unarmed not because the adversary has been driven away but because it has forgotten that it is in a conflict. The second error is the overestimation that produces obsession: the practically dualistic stance of the congregation that treats the demonic realm as an autonomous, barely-controllable power and makes the direct confrontation of specific demonic beings the primary focus of its spiritual life. This congregation is

misdirected not because it takes the adversary too seriously but because it takes Christ's victory too lightly.

The sober middle path takes both truths with full seriousness: the adversary is real, active, organized, and specifically hostile to the gospel and to those who proclaim it; and he is a creature on a leash, proactively defeated at the cross, comprehensively subordinate to the Christ in whom the believer stands, and destined for the lake of fire at the appointed time. The congregation that holds both truths simultaneously, the genuine danger and the certain victory, is the congregation best equipped to live the specific posture the New Testament commends: "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert... but resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8–9, NASB 1995). Sober and alert, because the danger is real. Firm in faith, because the victory is certain. That is the middle path. That is the life of the Christian soldier.

The practical markers of the sober middle path can be identified with reasonable precision. On the sober side: the congregation that is on the middle path takes the biblical testimony about the demonic realm seriously, teaches it with clarity and without embarrassment, recognizes the demonic dimension of the spiritual opposition it faces, prays with the urgency of those who know they are in a conflict, and deploys the resources God has provided with the seriousness that the conflict demands. On the alert side: the congregation that is on the middle path does not treat every difficulty as a direct demonic attack, does not attribute every sin to possession or oppression, does not engage in the elaborate rituals of territorial spirit mapping and binding, does not give the adversary more attention than the Scripture warrants, and does not allow awareness of the spiritual conflict to produce the anxiety and preoccupation that is itself a form of defeat.

The theological basis of the middle path is precisely the Christological supremacy that has governed this series from its opening lesson through every unit to its conclusion: Christ is Lord of the entire invisible realm, of the holy angels who serve His purposes and of the fallen angels whose proleptic defeat He accomplished at the cross. The believer who knows Christ as the Christology of this series has presented Him, the one in whom all things were created, through whom all things are held together, who is far above every rule and authority and power and dominion, and who has disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them in His triumphal procession, is the believer who can walk the middle path without being pulled off it by either complacency or obsession. The middle path is the path of Christological confidence, and it is the only safe path through the battleground of the Christian life.

VIII. Looking Forward: The Armor and the Consummation

Where Unit 6 Is Going and What the Entire Series Has Been Building Toward

Lesson 15 has established the reality, the proper character, and the governing posture of spiritual warfare. Lessons 16 and 17, the remaining lessons of Unit 6 and of the series, will complete the picture. Lesson 16 engages in detail with the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10–18, examining each piece of the armor in relation to the specific form of the demonic opposition it is designed to resist. The armor is not generic spiritual equipment; each piece is calibrated to a specific dimension of the adversary's assault, and

understanding that calibration is essential for the informed and effective wearing of it. Lesson 16 provides that understanding.

Lesson 17, the final lesson of the series, will provide the eschatological conclusion that the entire series has been building toward: the defeat of Satan at the cross, the final judgment and consummation described in Revelation 20, and the new creation in which every demonic power has been permanently eliminated and the reign of God is uncontested and complete. The consummation is not an afterthought appended to the practical theology of spiritual warfare; it is the ultimate framework within which the entire series must be received. The battleground life of the present age is lived in the light of a certain future, a future in which the adversary is in the lake of fire, the believers are with their Lord in the renewed creation, and the triumph accomplished at Calvary is consummated in the full and uninterrupted glory of the triune God.

The entire series, all twenty lessons, across all seven units, from the prolegomena of Unit 1 through the eschatological consummation of Unit 6, has been building a single, coherent, comprehensive theological vision: the vision of the invisible realm as Scripture reveals it, from the worship of the holy angels before the divine throne to the casting of the adversary into the lake of fire, governed at every point by the comprehensive lordship of Jesus Christ whose cross is the decisive event of all creation's history and whose return is the certain and approaching consummation of everything His cross accomplished. That is the vision this series has been delivering. And it is a vision designed not merely to inform the mind but to form the character of the church, to produce the specific combination of doxological wonder, Christological confidence, pastoral sobriety, and missionary courage that is the Christian life lived in full awareness of the world Scripture describes.

The battleground is real. The victory is certain. The armor is provided. The King has already won. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He commanded, and know that He is with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19–20). That is the commission that emerges from the systematic theology of the invisible realm. That is what the entire series has been preparing you for. Take it up with the confidence of those who know what the Scriptures say about the world they are entering and about the One who governs it.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Spiritual Warfare	The comprehensive engagement of the whole person and the whole community of faith with the triple opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, using the specific resources that God has provided for each form of opposition. In its biblical presentation, spiritual warfare is primarily about standing firm in the truth, resisting temptation, protecting the mind from doctrinal deception, maintaining the community of faith, and praying with persistent Spirit-directed prayer. It is not primarily about dramatic direct confrontation with named demonic beings, territorial spirit binding, or specialized exorcistic protocols. It is the universal condition of every believer and the universal calling of the entire church.
The World (Kosmos)	In its New Testament theological sense (John 15:18–19; 1 John 2:15–17; 5:19), the organized system of values, assumptions, priorities, and social arrangements that the fallen human race, under the governance of the prince of this world, has constructed in opposition to the knowledge of God and the claims of His kingdom. The world is not the created order (which is good) but the fallen cultural, social, and intellectual environment that shapes the imagination and desires of those who inhabit it. The apostolic response to the world as a source of spiritual opposition is the renewal of the mind by the Word of God (Romans 12:2) and non-conformation to the world's values and patterns.
The Flesh (Sarx)	In Paul's theological vocabulary, not the physical body but the fallen human nature, the indwelling principle of sin that remains in the believer after regeneration and that inclines toward everything God prohibits (Galatians 5:16–25; Romans 7:14–25; 8:5–9). The flesh is an internal enemy, it resides within the believer and exploits his specific weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and desires. The demonic realm exploits the flesh and the world reinforces it; but the flesh has its own independent contribution to spiritual opposition. The apostolic response to the flesh as a source of opposition is the putting to death of the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Romans 8:13) and the crucifixion of the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).
The Devil (Diabolos)	The personal, intelligent, organized external adversary whose activity amplifies and exploits the other two forms of opposition (world and flesh), directing the world system in his capacity as its prince and exploiting the flesh's inclinations through the specific tactical intelligence of a being who has studied human capitulation for the entirety of human history. The devil's specific contribution to the triple opposition of the believer is the subject of Units 4 and 5 of this

Term	Definition
	series. The apostolic response to the devil as a source of opposition is submission to God, resistance firm in faith (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9), and the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–18).
Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare (SLSW)	A spiritual warfare methodology associated with the New Apostolic Reformation and charismatic spiritual warfare movements, emphasizing the identification and confrontation of high-ranking territorial demonic spirits as a prerequisite for effective gospel advance in specific geographic regions. SLSW proponents typically engage in “spiritual mapping” (researching the spiritual history and demonic authorities of a region), prayer campaigns designed to “bind” territorial spirits, and elaborate intercession protocols for “opening” regions to the gospel. The Reformed critique: while SLSW draws on real biblical data (Daniel 10’s territorial spirits), it constructs a methodology that has no apostolic precedent in the New Testament and displaces the ordinary means of grace as the primary instruments of gospel advance.
Paligē / Palē	Greek: struggle, wrestling (Ephesians 6:12). The word Paul uses to describe the spiritual conflict in which every believer is engaged: “our struggle is not against flesh and blood.” Palē in classical Greek referred to the hand-to-hand wrestling match, a close, intense, personal physical engagement. Paul uses it metaphorically for the spiritual conflict, communicating the close, intense, personal character of the engagement with the demonic powers. The spiritual conflict is not a distant, impersonal, theoretical opposition; it is the close, intense, relentless engagement of a wrestling match in which the believer is personally and specifically targeted.
Fighting from Victory	The theological description of the believer’s position in spiritual warfare: engaging the conflict from the position of one whose Lord has already won, rather than striving toward an uncertain outcome. Christ has already defeated Satan at the cross (Colossians 2:15), already rendered powerless the one who had the power of death (Hebrews 2:14), and already been seated far above every spiritual power (Ephesians 1:21). The believer who stands in Christ stands in that accomplished position. Fighting from victory produces the sober, alert, persistent, faith-grounded resistance of those who know the outcome; fighting for victory produces the anxious, desperate engagement of those who feel the outcome depends on the intensity of their own effort.
Means of Grace	The divinely appointed instruments through which God communicates His grace to His people: the preaching and reading of the Word, prayer, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 88). In the theology of spiritual warfare, the means of grace are not merely devotional activities for the believer’s personal growth; they are the primary

Term	Definition
	weapons of the spiritual conflict. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17); prayer is the atmosphere in which the entire armor is worn (6:18); the sacraments renew the community's confidence in the accomplished victory; and the fellowship of the church provides the communal solidarity against which the adversary's strategy of isolation is most directly countered.
Kosmokratoras	Greek: world rulers, world forces (Ephesians 6:12). Used in the phrase "kosmokratoras tou skotous toutou" (world forces of this darkness). The term designates demonic beings of high rank who exercise ruling authority over the "darkness" (spiritual blindness and rebellion) of the present fallen age. The combination of kosmos (world) and krator (ruler) suggests beings whose authority extends to the governance of the fallen world system, consistent with Satan's designation as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31) and "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The kosmokratoras are among the highest-ranking demonic powers against which the believer's spiritual conflict is conducted.
Sober Middle Path	The theological posture that takes both the genuine danger of the spiritual conflict and the certain victory of Christ with full seriousness, charting a course between the complacency of practical naturalism (which ignores the adversary and leaves the congregation unarmed) and the obsession of practical dualism (which overestimates the adversary and gives him more attention than the Scripture warrants). The sober middle path is characterized by sobriety (recognizing the real danger), alertness (maintaining constant vigilance), and faith-grounded confidence (standing in the accomplished victory of Christ). It is the posture consistently commended by the New Testament's engagement with the spiritual conflict.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the Christian life is genuinely, really, concretely set in a spiritual conflict whose stakes are eternal and whose enemy is real. This belief is not the product of credulity or superstition; it is the direct conclusion of the entire biblical testimony about the invisible realm that this series has been engaged with from its first lesson. The congregation that has absorbed the theology of the holy angels, the fall of Satan, the nature and activity of the demonic realm, and the Christological triumph over every demonic power at the cross is equipped to hold this belief with the specific combination of sobriety and confidence that the Scripture commends: sober because the enemy is real and active; confident because the Victor has already won.

We must also believe that the primary resources for the spiritual conflict are the ordinary means of grace, and that their “ordinariness” is not evidence of their inadequacy but of God’s sovereign choice to work through specific creaturely means that He has ordained and promised to bless. The congregation that has been taught to look for extraordinary spiritual warfare methodology beyond the apostolic provision of Word, prayer, sacrament, and fellowship is a congregation that has been misled about where the real power lies. The Word of God is “divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:4); it does not need the supplement of territorial spirit binding to be effective in its assault on the strongholds of unbelief.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the reality of the spiritual conflict produce the specific emotional posture that the New Testament commends: not fear, not anxiety, not dramatic spiritual intensity, but the sober, alert, confident vigilance of soldiers who know their Commander has already won the decisive battle and are now implementing that victory in the ongoing campaign. The Christian soldier is not the frightened conscript who does not know whether his side will prevail; he is the confident servant of a King whose triumph is accomplished and whose return to consummate it is certain. The emotions appropriate to that position are not the anxious emotions of those who are fighting for a victory not yet secured but the confident emotions of those who are standing in and serving an accomplished one.

Desire the specific quality of Christological consciousness that makes the sober middle path possible: the daily, habitual, scripturally-formed awareness of who Christ is, what He has accomplished, and what position the believer occupies in Him. The believer who begins every day with the awareness that he is in Christ who is far above every rule and authority and power and dominion is the believer who can face the specific conflicts of that day with the specific confidence the New Testament commends. That awareness is not produced by dramatic spiritual experiences; it is produced by the sustained, faithful, consistent engagement with the Word of God that the entire series has commended as the primary resource of the spiritual life.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- **Conduct a thorough self-evaluation of your congregation's posture toward spiritual warfare.** Is your congregation more prone to the complacency of practical naturalism or the obsession of practical dualism? What specific evidence supports your assessment? What specific teaching, from this lesson, from the series as a whole, from the key texts, would most directly address the specific error your congregation is most prone to? And what specific changes in the regular teaching and preaching ministry of your congregation would most effectively bring it onto the sober middle path?
- **Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 carefully and identify what Paul means by “fortresses” and “speculations.”** The fortress imagery of 2 Corinthians 10 is not about territorial demonic spirits but about the intellectual and spiritual strongholds of unbelief, the “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.” Identify two or three specific “speculations”, intellectual, cultural, or spiritual assumptions, that most powerfully resist the knowledge of God in the specific mission field of your congregation. What are the specific weapons of the gospel, specific doctrinal affirmations, specific biblical texts, specific apostolic arguments, that most directly demolish those specific speculations in your specific context?
- **Preach or teach a sermon on Romans 8:31–39 as the definitive New Testament statement of what it means to fight from victory.** The passage moves from the assurance of divine election (vv. 31–33) through the certainty of the present intercession (v. 34) to the rhetorical challenge of the demonic powers (“Who will separate us?”, v. 35) to the overwhelming victory declaration (v. 37) and the comprehensive security of the love of God in Christ (“neither... principalities, nor... powers”, vv. 38–39). Preach the passage as the theological description of the believer's actual position in relation to every demonic power, and let it produce the specific combination of confidence and sobriety that the passage is designed to create.
- **Evaluate your congregation's actual engagement with the ordinary means of grace as the primary weapons of spiritual warfare.** Is the Word preached with the urgency and confidence of a community that knows it is wielding the sword of the Spirit against the strongholds of the adversary? Is prayer offered with the persistence, the community, and the Spirit-direction that Ephesians 6:18 describes as the atmosphere of the conflict? Do the sacraments renew the community's confidence in the accomplished victory and its belonging to the Victor? And does the fellowship of the church provide the mutual accountability and encouragement that counters the adversary's strategy of isolation? These are the questions that determine the actual spiritual warfare posture of a congregation.
- **Memorize Ephesians 6:10–12 and 1 Peter 5:8–11 as the two bookends of the biblical theology of spiritual warfare.** The Ephesians passage establishes the comprehensive divine provision (the full armor) and the comprehensive adversarial opposition (rulers, powers, world forces, spiritual forces of wickedness). The 1 Peter passage establishes the appropriate posture (sober, alert) and the appropriate response (resist, firm in faith) within the communal context of a worldwide church engaged in the same conflict. Together they constitute the apostolic framework for the

entire theology of spiritual warfare that Unit 6 is developing, and they are worth inhabiting as the daily cognitive and spiritual framework within which the Christian life is understood.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging the discussion questions, take stock of where you are on the spectrum between the two errors this lesson describes: the complacency of practical naturalism (the tendency to ignore or minimize the spiritual conflict) and the obsession of practical dualism (the tendency to overestimate the adversary and make spiritual warfare the dominant focus). Which error are you naturally more prone to? And what specific influences, theological formation, personal experience, cultural context, church background, have most shaped your position on that spectrum?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Ephesians 6:10–20 as a complete unit. What is the first command (v. 10), and what is its theological grounding? What is the purpose of the full armor (v. 11)? What is the nature of the opposition described in verse 12, and what specific vocabulary is used to describe it? What are the individual pieces of armor (vv. 14–17) and how do they relate to each other? And what is the role of prayer in relation to the armor (vv. 18–20), is it a piece of armor among others, or something else?
- Read 1 Peter 5:6–11. What is the immediate context of the spiritual warfare instruction (vv. 6–7)? What does the lion image communicate about the character and activity of the adversary (v. 8)? What is the command to the reader (v. 9a), and what is the grounding of that command (v. 9b)? What communal dimension does the instruction include (v. 9c)? And what is the promised outcome of faithful resistance (vv. 10–11)?
- Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 carefully. What does Paul mean by the claim that the weapons of our warfare are “not of the flesh” but “divinely powerful”? What are the specific targets of these weapons, what are the “fortresses,” the “speculations,” and the “lofty things” that are to be demolished? How does the description of the weapons’ targets (intellectual, spiritual strongholds) challenge the popular notion that spiritual warfare is primarily about direct confrontational engagement with named demonic beings?
- Read John 15:18–19 and 1 John 2:15–17; 5:19. How does John define “the world” in its theological sense as a source of spiritual opposition? What is the relationship between the world in this sense and the devil as the ruler of the world? And what does John’s instruction to “not love the world” (1 John 2:15) practically require in terms of the believer’s relationship to the cultural, social, and intellectual environment in which he lives?
- Read Galatians 5:16–25 and Romans 8:5–9, 13. How does Paul describe the flesh as a source of spiritual opposition? What are the specific “deeds of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19–21) and what is the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit? What is the apostolic prescription for the flesh as a source of opposition (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:24)? And how does the flesh relate to the world and the devil in the triple-source analysis of spiritual opposition?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the phrase “not against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12) does not deny the human dimension of spiritual opposition but establishes the spiritual dimension as ultimate. What is the practical implication of this for the way the church engages cultural, political, and social opposition? How does the recognition of the spiritual dimension change the church’s strategy for engagement without dismissing the importance of the human-political dimension?
- The lesson argues that the primary weapons of spiritual warfare are the ordinary means of grace, and that their “ordinariness” is not evidence of inadequacy but of God’s sovereign choice to work through appointed means. What is the theological basis for this claim? And how does the Reformed theology of the ordinary means of grace challenge both the sensationalist spiritual warfare tradition (which looks for extraordinary means) and the rationalist tradition (which dismisses the supernatural dimension of the means entirely)?
- The lesson distinguishes between “fighting from victory” and “fighting for victory.” How does this distinction change the emotional and spiritual posture of the believer in the conflict? And how does the doctrine of the accomplished cross-victory produce the specific combination of confidence (the outcome is certain) and sobriety (the conflict is real) that the sober middle path requires?
- The lesson identifies two pastoral errors, complacency (ignoring the adversary) and obsession (overestimating him), and proposes the sober middle path as the biblical alternative. Is the middle path genuinely stable, or does it tend to drift toward one extreme or the other depending on the specific challenges the congregation faces? What specific theological disciplines and pastoral practices most effectively maintain the middle path under the pressures that would pull the congregation toward one of the two errors?
- The lesson closes with an anticipation of Lessons 16 and 17, the armor of God in detail and the eschatological consummation. How does the eschatological framework, the certain consummation in which every demonic power is permanently eliminated and the reign of God is uncontested, function as the ultimate grounding of the spiritual warfare posture the New Testament commends? And how should the anticipated consummation shape the character, the urgency, and the confidence of the church’s present engagement with the conflict?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson describes the Christian life as “a battleground, not a playground.” Evaluate the degree to which your congregation’s life and ministry reflects this description. In what specific ways do your congregation’s regular activities, corporate worship, small groups, evangelism, pastoral care, personal devotion, reflect the posture of those who know they are in a genuine spiritual conflict? And in what ways do they reflect the comfort of those who have forgotten that they are?
- The lesson identifies three enemies (world, flesh, devil) whose opposition is mutually reinforcing and constantly interacting. Identify a specific pattern of sin or spiritual weakness in your own life or in the lives of those you pastor. Analyze it according to the triple-source framework: what is

the specific contribution of the world (social reinforcement, cultural normalization), the flesh (internal inclination, specific desire), and the devil (tactical exploitation, amplification)? And what specific provision from the ordinary means of grace most directly addresses each dimension of the opposition?

- The lesson argues that the ordinary means of grace are the primary weapons of the spiritual conflict. Evaluate your own practice of the means of grace as a form of spiritual warfare rather than merely personal devotion. Do you approach your Bible reading, your prayer, your attendance at worship and the Lord's Supper with the awareness that you are putting on the armor of God and taking up the sword of the Spirit? What specific change in your consciousness of what you are doing in those practices would most deepen their effectiveness as weapons of the conflict?
- The lesson's description of the sober middle path requires holding two truths simultaneously: the genuine danger (the adversary is real and active) and the certain victory (Christ has already won). In your current experience, which truth is easier to hold and which requires more intentional effort to maintain? What specific practices of biblical meditation, theological reflection, or communal encouragement most help you maintain the truth that is harder for you to hold?
- This lesson opens Unit 6. As you prepare to engage the remaining lessons of the series, the armor of God (Lesson 16) and the eschatological consummation (Lesson 17), what is the single most important truth about spiritual warfare that this lesson has established as the foundation for those lessons? And how has the cumulative teaching of the entire series, all fifteen lessons from the prolegomena of Unit 1 through the warfare theology of Unit 6, prepared you to engage the consummation with the specific combination of hope, confidence, and pastoral urgency that the final lesson is designed to produce?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a slow, deliberate reading of Ephesians 6:10–20, not as a familiar text to be scanned but as a comprehensive map of the conflict and the provision. Read it with the specific awareness this lesson has cultivated: the conflict is real (v. 12), the provision is comprehensive (vv. 14–17), and the atmosphere of the whole is prayer (vv. 18–20). As you read, allow the weight of each element to settle: the full armor is not optional spiritual equipment for the especially devout; it is the necessary provision for a conflict every believer is engaged in every day. Every piece of armor is a response to a specific form of adversarial assault. Every provision God has made is calibrated to the specific character of the opposition it is designed to resist.

Begin the prayer itself with a deliberate acknowledgment of the triple opposition: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Name the specific forms in which the world most powerfully opposes the gospel and the life of your congregation in your specific cultural context. Name the specific forms in which the flesh most powerfully inclines you and those you pastor toward the patterns of sin that the adversary most consistently exploits. And name the specific forms of demonic activity, temptation, deception, accusation, oppression, that you most clearly recognize as operative in the spiritual lives of your congregation. This is not the prayer of those who are terrified by the opposition; it is the prayer of those who have named the opposition accurately and are bringing it before the God who holds the leash and governs every aspect of it.

Pray for the specific posture the sober middle path requires in your congregation. Pray against the complacency that forgets the conflict: that God would produce in your congregation the specific sobriety and alertness that 1 Peter 5:8 commands, the awareness that the adversary is prowling and that the Christian life is lived on a battleground rather than a playground. Pray against the obsession that overcorrects the complacency: that God would protect your congregation from the preoccupation with the demonic that produces fear and anxiety rather than the confident resistance that faith produces. Pray specifically for the sober middle path: the posture that takes both the genuine danger and the certain victory with full seriousness, and lives accordingly.

Pray for the ordinary means of grace as the primary weapons of the conflict. Pray for the Word preached in your congregation: that it would be wielded as the sword of the Spirit, that it would demolish the specific speculations and intellectual strongholds that resist the knowledge of God in your specific mission context, and that it would produce the genuine obedience to Christ that 2 Corinthians 10:5 describes as the goal of the conflict. Pray for prayer itself: that your congregation's corporate prayer life would have the urgency, the persistence, the community, and the Spirit-direction that Ephesians 6:18 describes, "all prayer and petition... at all times in the Spirit... with all perseverance... for all the saints." Pray that the sacraments would renew confidence in the accomplished victory, and that the fellowship of the church would provide the mutual accountability and encouragement that counters the adversary's strategy of isolation.

Close with the declaration of Romans 8:37–39 as the theological ground of everything: “In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Declare it as the comprehensive security of every member of your congregation, in their specific battles, their specific vulnerabilities, their specific experiences of spiritual attack and spiritual discouragement. The principalities and the powers are named in that passage; so is the verdict: none of them will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. That is what it means to fight from victory. Receive it. Stand in it. Live from it.

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith.”

1 Peter 5:8–9, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Ephesians 6:10–20; 1 Peter 5:6–11; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5; James 4:7–8; Romans 8:28–39; 1 John 2:15–17; 4:4; 5:19; Galatians 5:16–25; Colossians 1:13–14; 2:13–15*

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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