

# ***Recognizing the Spiritual Players***

## **Winning the Real Battle**

**Ephesians 6:10-12**

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Suppose someone was trying to break up your marriage. This schemer knew the hot buttons to push in you and your spouse; he knew exactly what would tear you apart. He knew also that he couldn't get you right away, he would have to go slow so that his role wouldn't be obvious. Suppose that over time he got you to really hurt one another. One moment he'd tell you to go ahead and buy something because "*you really deserve it and need it now,*" even though you knew it would anger your wife; and the next moment he'd secretly tell your wife that she's justified in saying something that would hurt you deeply. Repeatedly he got you to hurt each other so that now when you look at each other, there is more anger than love. Even though at the start of your relationship you could hardly keep your hands off one another, now you can hardly stand being together; and you find yourself thinking that maybe you were never meant to be, maybe the two of you are just incompatible. You begin to dislike, even resent what God says about marriage. What would happen, then, if the two of you began to realize that you've been pawns in this scheme? How would you change if you now understood that all along this clever fiend had seized upon you and your spouse's vulnerabilities and used them to drive

you apart? What if you discovered that your marriage was only a part of the target, that this malevolent creature was tricking you and your spouse in order to get you to pull away from God? He's trying to make you doubt God's love and become resentful of God's word? How would you respond? Would you begin to rethink what's happening in your marriage and what you might do to address it?

One of the biggest problems we have as believers is our vision. We don't see the real battle. Many of us are stuck in Job's vision, and we need to move to Jesus's vision. Although Job loved and believed in God, he didn't have a clue what hit him. When a tornado swept away his family, he thought it was God. When Chaldeans and Sabians grabbed his property, he thought it was God. When a storm devoured his crops, he thought it was God. When his own body became riddled with sores, he thought it was God; and he told God, "*Leave me alone, let me die.*" Refusing to dishonor God, he chose instead to mourn, cry and tell God that he wish he hadn't been born. That's Job's vision. In Job's vision there's trust, but also despair... because there's no understanding. Job had no idea about the real battle affecting him. Job knew there was a God who had treated him well, but that's all he knew. We need to enlarge our vision from that which was held by a righteous man in 1700 B.C. to that which was carried and taught by the one who is our bread, who is our wisdom and life.

When Jesus was arrested, he did not wonder what God was doing to him. Instead, he told his captors:

***Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour-- when darkness reigns.*** (Luke 22:53, NIV)

Jesus says, “*This is your hour,*” because he recognizes that he was given into the hand of his opponents for a time. He says, “*This is your hour—when darkness reigns,*” because he sees spiritual beings darkening the lives of his captors, exercising dominion by trickery and deceit. That is clear and explicit in John, chapter 14. There Jesus tells his disciples as they leave for the garden where he’ll be arrested:

***I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*** (John 14:30-31, NIV)

Jesus understands that his enemy is *the Prince of this world*. He realizes that he is really battling Satan. Even though Satan has no grip on Jesus, even though Satan exercises no direct dominion over him (“*He has no hold on me,*” says Jesus), Jesus experiences Satan’s dominion through people. He does so in obedience and trust of his father whose great plan is unfolding. Indicating even more that his struggles are not with people but with spiritual players, Jesus prays for those who crucify him, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” He prays that way because they are deceived, and they are pawns of the real enemy.

Have you ever thought that when you are fighting with someone, you could be purposely deceived and a pawn? Have you ever thought when you’re sarcastic or your temper erupts that you’re a pawn? Have you ever thought when you gossip, cheat, hold a grudge, curse, or sin in any way that you’re acting as someone’s pawn? Someone’s tricking you, someone’s deceiving you, someone’s cleverly using you for their own malicious aims. They want to do what we talked about last week, erode your trust in God’s love and exercise dominion over you. They also want to make you a stumbling block for somebody else.

When Jesus told his disciples, “***Whoever wants to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me,***” he was speaking of a battle with spiritual powers that will use every fear, every threat, every point of vulnerability, every

temptation to strip us of our confidence in God's love and divide our partnership with God. When we partner with God, we reclaim dominion from the devil. We liberate ourselves and others as well. Thus, our battle is not with any human being, no matter how offensive. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:

***Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*** (Ephesians 6:10-12 NIV)

The Scripture clearly reveals that in our conflicts we encounter the devil's schemes. Jesus's struggle was not with Pilate or the chief priests; it was not with the crowds who cried, "Crucify him!" It was with Satan and his fallen company who were controlling the moment through their deception. These fallen spirits were exercising dominion. Darkness reigned.

Recognizing the spiritual players is so important because it helps you understand (1) who is your enemy, (2) what you are fighting, and (3) how you can win. If we don't focus on these players, we become frustrated because our efforts are not aimed at the real problems that make a difference.

A major reason we lost the Vietnam War is that we didn't recognize our enemy until it was too late. We got into the conflict and found ourselves facing the Soviets and the Chinese; and when that reality stopped any planning to capture Hanoi, we found ourselves defending a country against an enemy we dare not destroy. In contrast, our intelligence in the Gulf War not only identified who, but where and how we could best defeat our enemies. The result was a convincing victory.

When you recognize the real players, you develop the strategies to win. When you cease to see your spouse as the villain, you begin to fight for him or her rather than with him or her. When you recognize that thieves, that gossips, that bullies, that swindlers are all being swindled themselves, you can begin to fight with different weapons, weapons that will liberate rather than condemn them.

There are evil spiritual players and good ones. There's the Holy Spirit who God gives to all who ask. According to Jesus, your children have angels who constantly talk to God about them. A great God is poised to help you win the battle. Remember that the aim of the evil one is to erode your confidence in God's love. That gives us clues about how to respond and win.

We can work with others to close up areas of vulnerability in our lives. We can sow different kind of seed in our spouses; and if our spouses happens to see along with us the true enemy, we can partner together to expose the schemes and address our weaknesses. The battle we are in is up close and very personal. But so is our God. His love is worthy of our trust, and in Christ we have the wisdom and power to win.