

THE NATURE OF THE WAR

You are involved in a war: a war not of your own choosing, a war that has been going on long before you came onto the scene, but a war that has a profound and personal effect on you. In fact, what you do about it will determine where and how you will spend eternity, for you must choose whose side you are on.

Yes, you must choose sides and, on the basis of that choice, become a winner or a loser. However, you cannot avoid the war; you are involved in it right now whether you know it or not. So, you need to know what the war is all about and must decide whose side you are on.

What is this war in which you are involved? Well, it began when Lucifer, the bright morning star, the highest of the archangels whom God had made, decided that he was not satisfied with his position under God.

In his pride, Lucifer declared his independence: *“I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will make myself like the Most High”* (1).

War broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back but were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down. That ancient serpent, called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (2).

The direct challenge to God by Lucifer was over. He lost his position in heaven next to God and was hurled down to earth. Lucifer, the “light-bearer”, became Satan, the “adversary”.

In his victory statement, God spoke to Lucifer: *“You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering. On the day that you were created, they were prepared. You were on the holy mountain of God. You walked among the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created until iniquity was found in you. In the abundance of your trade, you were filled with violence and sinned. So, I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from among the stones of fire.*

“Your heart was proud because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings to feast their eyes on you.

“By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries. So I brought out fire from within you. It consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you.

“All who know you among the people are appalled at you. You have come to a dreadful end and will be no more forever.

“Will you still say, ‘I am a god?’ “ (3)

“Yet, down to the nether world you go to the recesses of the pit! When they see you, they will stare, pondering over you: ‘Is this the one who made the earth tremble and kingdoms quake? Who made the world a desert, razed its cities, and gave its captives no release?’ ” (4)

Yes, the direct challenge was ended. Judgment was pronounced. But the war is

not yet over. Unable to go against God himself, Satan went to war against God's highest creature, human beings; human beings whom God took special care and counsel to make in his own image and likeness; human beings who were given lordship and dominion over all of God's creation; human beings who were to be rulers and kings under God and, more than that, children bearing the family resemblance of their Father.

Seeing that resemblance to God, God's enemy, Satan, went to war. He offered to human beings the same status he had claimed for himself. Notice his strategy as recorded in Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis:

1. He raised the question: did you hear God correctly? *"Did God tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?"* (5)

2. Eve answered correctly. *"God said we could eat fruit from any tree in the garden except the one in the middle. He told us not to eat fruit from that tree or even to touch it. If we do, we will die"* (6). Yes, Adam and Eve had heard God correctly. They knew what his command to them was and the consequence of disobeying it, so they were not in doubt or ignorance.

3. Satan, then, reinterpreted God's command and made God a liar: *You will not die for God knows that, when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God, knowing good and evil***" (7).

Now God knew, because he was already at war, that disobedience would mean death for human beings as it had for Satan. That is why the order in Chapter 2, verse 16 - *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you will die."* - was both a command and a warning. God knew that human beings would only find their perfect fulfillment in "freedom of obedience", not in "freedom of choice".

When man and woman opted for "freedom of choice" over "freedom of obedience", they, like Satan, became the next casualty. *God formed human beings to be imperishable; in the image of his own nature he made them. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in its possession experience it* (8). And so, the judgment pronounced first upon Lucifer is now pronounced upon human beings.

From that point on, the prince of the fallen angels became also the prince of this world. From that point on, every man and woman has been born behind enemy lines. Instead of being begotten in the image of God, we are now begotten in the image of Satan. That is because, in choosing to listen to and to obey Satan, Adam and Eve yielded their, and our, authority and dominion over all creation to him.

Thus, when you were born, you were born in enemy territory. At your best, you could only be a prisoner of war in that territory. But it is worse than that. Reflecting the image of your master, Satan, you were a willing servant of his army and a dedicated enemy of God's army, as you chose to do your own will, your own "thing". You were separated from the God whom you were created to serve and whose nature and dominion you were given to share. Spiritually, you were dead, and there was no way in your own power that you could do anything about it.

However the "GOOD NEWS" is that into your situation came Jesus Christ, God's own Son. He came to replace the "I will not" of man and of Satan with the "I will" of perfect obedience.

When you read the Gospels, the Good News carefully, you will notice that Jesus never exercised "freedom of choice". His life was a perfect, unselfish, "I will" to his

Father: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work (9). I have not come down from heaven to do my own will but the will of him who sent me (10). I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me (11).*

Even when he came to the end of his work and was agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane in the face of his impending crucifixion and death, Jesus chose submission and obedience: *“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, **not what I want but what you want**” (12). “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, **your will be done**” (13).*

Jesus exercised the “freedom of obedience” that God wanted from human beings. His life was also a perfect “I will” to his fellow human beings: He said to Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, *“Follow me, and **I will make you fish for people**” (14). “**I will come and cure him,**” he said to the Roman centurion (15). “You are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my Church. . . I will give** you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (16).*

Jesus, the obedient Son, is Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus is declared Lord because of his obedience. *Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven (angels and saints) and on earth (humans) and under the earth (Satan’s army), and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father. (17)* Jesus Christ is Lord only because he freely submitted himself to the will of the Father.

You must do the same if you have not submitted yourself to the will of the Father. You must do the same daily if you have. If you are spiritually dead, you must first allow yourself to be re-born of God. For Jesus says, *“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above or born anew. No one can enter the kingdom of God (get out from behind enemy lines) without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (18).*

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save it. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who have not believed are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God (19). Jesus said again, *“I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (20).*

This is as clear as the command about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil back in the garden. Your choice, as theirs, is to obey or to let Satan reinterpret the words of Jesus to you. Your judgment is based on the choice you make. The proof of your faith is always your obedience, your “I will”.

And so, to you and to me Jesus says, *“Come to me, all of you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For*

my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (21).

To you and to me Jesus says, "*Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven*" (22.)

To you and to me Jesus says, "Lay down your arms and surrender. Come join my army. Go free. Give up your 'freedom of choice' that brings rebellion and death and exercise the 'freedom of obedience' that I gave you in the beginning." In this you will find your salvation. For the purpose of salvation is to bring you into obedient, willing submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ now and for all eternity.

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight, (the Father) has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we might live for the praise of his glory" (23).

"He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. In him, all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the Body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. In him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, God was pleased to reconcile in himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (24).

You and I were once alienated from him. You still are if you have not committed yourself to him as Savior **and** Lord. You and I, "*who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death so as to present us holy and blameless and irreproachable before him -- provided that we continue securely established and steadfast in the faith without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that we heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven*" (25).

Yes, "*when we were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of our flesh (when we were imprisoned behind enemy lines), God made us alive together with him when he forgave us all our transgressions, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities (Satan's army) and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it*" (26).

I pray that "*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to*

come” (27).

The fundamental question of all life is: Who is going to be God? Salvation is the victory walk of the army of God. The basic question of salvation is not “when were you saved” but rather “are you letting Jesus the Savior, through the holy Spirit whom he has sent, bring you under the rule of Jesus the Lord?” Are you really committed to the Army of Jesus Christ? Or are you being a double agent, trying to serve in both armies?

Jesus says, “*Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*” (28). “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Those who want to save their life (that is, do their own thing) will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake (by submitting it to the Lordship of Jesus) will find it*” (29).

Salvation is not complete until Jesus is Lord of every area of your life that is under your conscious control. Jesus wants to be Lord of your *whole* life: your spouse, your children, your job, your hopes, your dreams, and your plans. The yielding of your will that results in salvation in the first place is the same ongoing yielding that brings you under the Lordship of Jesus. To the extent that you refuse to yield, to that extent you are still in rebellion against the will of God in that area of your life.

That is why Jesus says, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day (of judgment), many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers’*” (30).

That is why he also says, “*We know that God does not listen to sinners (that is, to those in rebellion) but does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will*” (31). If you cannot submit to the Lordship of Jesus, it will be impossible for you to submit to any authority he places over you or to your brother or sister in any part of the body of Christ, the Church. The whole goal and thrust of God’s activity is that every knee should bow in obedient and willful submission and every tongue should confess and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Yes, the war is real! The war is daily! However you have to choose which side you are on. Victory is assured because Jesus has already overcome his enemy once and for all. But just as the Israelites received only that part of the Promised Land for which they fought, you also still have your battles to win. Remember, though, that you don’t fight alone if you choose Jesus as your Lord. He is the “Captain of the Hosts”, and he fights for you and with you in every battle.

So, I say to you: “*Now therefore, revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served...and serve the Lord. If you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*” (32).

(1) Isaiah 14:13 & 14

(2) Revelation 12:6-9

(3) Ezekiel 28:12b-19, 9a

(4) Isaiah 14:15, 17

(5) Genesis 3:1

(6) Genesis 3:2 & 3

(17) Philippians 2:6-11

(18) John 3:3, 5-6

(19) John 3:16-18

(20) John 10:7-10

(21) Matthew 11:28-30

(22) Matthew 10: 32-33

- (7) Genesis 3:4
- (8) Wisdom 2:23-24
- (9) John 4:34
- (10) John 6:38
- (11) John 5:30
- (12) Matthew 26:39
- (13) Matthew 26:42
- (14) Matthew 4:19
- (15) Matthew 8:7
- (16) Matthew 16:18-19
- (23) Ephesians 1:7-12
- (24) Colossians 1:15-20
- (25) Colossians 1:21-23
- (26) Colossians 2:13-15
- (27) Ephesians 1:18-21
- (28) Matthew 12:50
- (29) Matthew 16:24-25
- (30) Matthew 7:21-23
- (31) John 9:31
- (32) Joshua 24:14-15