

False Prophets Acts 19:13-16

We have seen Paul come into the city of Ephesus and preach the gospel. People come to Christ and then there is a rise of opposition. This has been the habitual pattern throughout the Book of Acts. But we also see in this passage that many signs and wonders, extraordinary miracles were done by God through the hand of Paul. People trusted in amulets and certain so-called powerful objects. The occult was live and well, but we see here that the objects used were common everyday cloths that touched Paul. But the whole goal is to undergird or support the message of God's kingdom through Jesus Christ. It authenticates or gives a verification of the validity of the message.

But here is the thing, just because a sign and wonder is done, doesn't mean that a person is from God. Moses when he went before Pharaoh did many signs and even levelled many curses that the magicians in Pharaoh's court copied. Moses did it to verify to Pharaoh that he is the servant of the Most High God and he must let the people go, but we see Satan always has his mission working to counterfeit the very work of God. Someone once said when you look at the miracles and wonders done in the health-wealth-prosperity movement you can't argue with the evidence. This was a clear sign that God is in it, but is he? If someone brings another Christ or another gospel, no matter how great the wonder performed they are not from God. Listen to what Galatians 1:8-9, **"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."** So think of it, if someone says they have done miracles, and you can't explain some of the wonders that they have done, and they preach Christ's main purpose for coming is to make you healthy, happy, and wealthy then you know they are a false prophet — a deceiver. Why? It is another gospel. It is a false gospel. Christ came to give himself as that perfect ransom for sin. He even promises tribulation in this life.

Think of it, if someone does something unexplainable but teaches something contrary to what is found in the Scriptures, against some truth already given then we know they are a false prophet no matter how great the work. Listen to Deuteronomy 13:1-3, **"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."** Think of Benny Hinn who once said that there were nine members of the trinity or in the God-head. Don't listen to him. No matter what power they say they have, it is not from God.

Also, I think if you really look at these ministries they are a lot more suspect as far as miracles than they would ever admit. John MacArthur writes about Hinn's ministry, **"Of course, if Benny Hinn could really do what he claims, he could empty hospitals and curb disease in Third World countries. Like Jesus, he would be able**

to banish sickness and suffering in whatever regions he visited. But because he does not possess the true gift, Hinn requires people come to him—to the place where he can manipulate the audience and control all the details. That obviously flies in the face of the New Testament paradigm. As Robert Bowman rightly points out, ‘Scheduling the Holy Spirit to come to one’s church at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday nights to perform healings is alien to the Bible.’”

And here is the incredible thing we see in the Book of Acts, many times when there is an authentic work of God, there will be those who seek to profit by it by offering some kind of counterfeit or by manipulating the real thing for their own purposes. You could see this earlier with Simon Magus who tried to buy the Holy Spirit from Peter, and here are these men who try to duplicate God’s ministry through Paul. There is the magician in Cyprus in Acts 13:6. And you can see occultism right here.

And here is the thing, spiritual warfare is real. We have an enemy. There are demons and evil forces in this world. Ephesians 6:12, **“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”** All of us are involved in spiritual warfare right now whether you realize it or not. But what is spiritual warfare? How do we fight and battle? And those are great questions that I hope to answer and give some clarity, because God wants us in the battle. He wants us to be seeking to make much of Christ. All of us need to be involved in spiritual warfare. So I want us to see a couple things.

1. The first is a negative, I want us to see how we aren’t to battle Satan. Vv. 13-14

Now there are a couple of errors we make when it comes to spiritual warfare. One is that we live in a very materialistic and concrete world. We believe in things we see, and we discount what we do not see. So when we say that we have three enemies as believers — the world, the flesh and the devil, we many times discount the devil and the unseen world. We give secular answers. Much of the psycho language used discounts sin and the spiritual. But the great adversary is real, and he wants most of all to destroy your confidence in Christ. He wants you to discount God’s word. He is a roaring lion who wants to devour your faith and trust in Christ. We know there are those who go to the opposite extreme and see Satan under every problem and bush. And their eyes are constantly fixated on Satan rather than Christ. They seek to bind him and his demons any time they see sin in their lives.

The other error is to use this passage of scripture in our battle with spiritual forces that cannot be seen. I do not know how many in the Spiritual War Movement, as it is called, use this passage as a template to battle Satan. Let me say that it does not end well. And it is amazing because with all the books and courses that are out there in how to fight Satan we are never told or commanded in scripture to engage him or bind him or seek to confine him directly as if we had that power. Our power is not in binding or fighting Satan but in trusting our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Now with that in mind, look at verse 13, **“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’** Notice, some of the Jewish exorcists. These exorcists travelled around and sought to cast out

demons for prophet. They, like many today had long rituals and incantations in hopes that they could control and rid the demon out of the person and thus giving that person release. This was all done for a price. Now Jews were not allowed to speak the holy name Yahweh or Jehovah, but when news spread that Paul was casting out demons, and remember this was part of his apostolic credentials and part of that transition period that we looked at last time, and no doubt it was done with ease and immediately, but they sought to replicate that. And think about it, because this has more to do with a magic spell. They are just trying to come up with the right name and phrases in order to cast out the unclean spirit.

And notice it is the Jesus whom Paul proclaims. What is missing of course is the main aspect of Paul's ministry, which is salvation for sinners through Christ. But they are not interested in that aspect but only the casting out aspect. Here is one Catholic website which details the process of exorcism, it names three "r's" reject, renounce and rebuke, **"To 'reject' is to make an act of the will which says in effect: 'I do not want this evil spirit.' To 'renounce' is to give back any benefits desired or received in the demonic relationship. To 'rebuke' is sharply denouncing the evil spirit. In deliverance work, an important step in the process of liberation is cutting the relationship between the individual and the evil spirit. While a simple rejection would likely suffice, we have found these three R's to be a bit more thorough and decisive.**

After the afflicted person has formally rejected the evil spirit, the Exorcist can then invoke the authority of the Church and more easily cast it out. While the entire process of casting out demons can take some time, this formal process of rejecting the evil spirits, using the three R's, is an important step along the way." Remember, there was no process with Jesus and his apostles. Healings and casting out of these afflicting spirits was decisive and immediate.

Look at verse 14, **"Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this."** Now "Sceva" was not the high priest. There are a couple of possibilities here. One is that he is connected to the family of the high priest and might have been one of the chief priests. The other is he took this title on himself as a way of showing self importance and drawing others to him. Many even take the title "apostle" today, even though there is no possibility of apostles today, to take on an authority and prestige in the church of Jesus Christ. There are seven of them that are engage in this task, so there is a whole team of men seeking to bind and cast out this unclean spirit, which again is so different to what we see in the gospels and acts.

2. We need to see the outcome. Vv15-16

In the end there is a humiliation of all those who happen to be counterfeit representatives of the Most High, seeking to use their so-called gifts and talents to line their own pockets. It might be that they have what looks like their day in the sun, but here is the thing about all prosperity preachers, they all get sick and die. If sin is the cause of all sickness and death, then you would think that none of these preachers would ever die. Oral Roberts who even started a hospital that tried to combine medicine and faith healing died. And many of the so-called exorcists that happen today only give temporary relief, but in the end leave the person more shackled to their sin

after all the emotion and after all the drama of the exorcism has taken place. And the reason is they are fighting on the wrong battle front. They are using the wrong implements in their battle with Satan. If you are using diabetes drugs to fight cancer it is going to end badly. If we think that our greatest problem is a spirit problem rather than a spiritual problem then things are going to go desperately wrong for us. Our greatest problem is our own personal sin and our own sinful hearts. Our problem is often we don't believe that. Do you believe your greatest problem is your sinful heart?

But look verse 15 because this is certainly dramatic, **“But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’”** Here, the sons of Sceva think they have the ability through the right order and through the right formula to control the evil spirit. And notice what it is — an evil spirit. It has knowledge and personhood. It is able to communicate. The scriptures indicate that demons know Jesus and tremble. And no doubt, they know about Paul as an official representative of Christ. But they do not know these seven sons. In other words, these seven sons have no relationship to the Lord in whose name they come in. They are not only unknown to the spirit but they are unknown to the Saviour. There is no relationship with him. It reminds us of the words of our Lord on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21-23, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”**

Think of why Paul cast out demons or why Jesus did, it certainly aided and helped those who were afflicted, it gave them relief, but the main reason was to validate the message. It was the same reason for the healings. People need their sins forgiven. They need to trust in Christ. This whole scene is so devoid of the main intent. These were signs to a greater reality and greater kingdom. But they didn't care about the eternal destiny of the souls of these individuals. It was a way of lining their pockets and showing their importance. And as we said, it didn't end well. Look at verse 16, because the tables are turned, and to say they were unsuccessful would be an understatement, **“And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”** Here the man has heightened strength, and notice that he mastered them and overpowered them. This is exactly what they wanted to do to him. But he is in control of the situation, not them. And the outcome is utter humiliation — they did the only thing they could do and that is they fled while having their clothes ripped off and physically wounded by the whole ordeal.

Now we can see that it didn't end well, and there is a clear demarcation between Paul's ministry and their efforts. And certainly Paul's ministry was unique. God was not healing and casting out spirits through others. But it does beg the question — how are we to engage in spiritual warfare? 1 Peter 5:8 says, **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** How are we to be vigilant and watchful? Let me name a couple of ways. One is that we have to fight on the right battle front. The word of God says that we have three great enemies — the world, the flesh and the devil. But it is not that

we have three kinds of problems, but these work in concert with one another to take our gaze and trust off Jesus. The emphasis of Scripture is always a human drama. It is always, whether if Satan tempts us or the world allures us, or the eyes of our mind seeks to captivate us to trust in ourselves or seek something else rather than God. So the battlefield is the human heart. It is amazing in the Old Testament that occult practices are all around them, yet they are never commanded to battle Satan directly or cast out demons. But the call is to trust in God, to throw off idolatry, to draw near to him.

Think about it, Job is afflicted by Satan. He takes away his health, family and all his assets and leaves him on a trash pile scraping his open sores. If anyone has a demon problem it is Satan. But what is the big question through the book of Job? It is a human drama. Is God worthy enough to be trusted? Will Job curse God and die or will he follow him. Job falters somewhat, and at the end of the book Job repents of his sin and trusts in God. Why? Because the main battle field is the heart no matter where the attack is coming from. Will we sin or will we trust God? And here is the thing we see in the Book of Job, Satan is God's devil, and what I mean by that is he cannot do anything without the permission of God. God is sovereign. He is in control, he sets the limits, even when things go desperately wrong in our lives.

The second thing is with all the volumes of literature that have been written on spiritual warfare, there are only three passages of Scriptures that really instruct us how to engage in spiritual warfare. And the message is always the same — we fight through repentance of our own personal sin. We do not blame it on Satan or others, and we draw near to God. The longest passage is in Ephesians 6:10-20, but let me just give the two opening verses of that passage, 10-11, **“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”** Notice how you stand against the devil and his schemes. Be strong in the Lord. Put on what he has given you, and they are all implements that we celebrate in our salvation — the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the peace of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. This is what it looks like to draw near to God in repentance and faith. All of these elements have been covered through in the Book of Ephesians already. We draw near to Christ.

The next passage is James 4:7-10, and look for the elements of repentance and drawing near to our Lord in it, **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”** Satan loves a proud Christian, it is only with humble and repentant and mournful hearts that we turn to Christ and see what he has done. That is the joy of the Lord. We fight Satan, and engage in spiritual warfare, not by flashy and sensational signs and wonders but the same way we came to follow our Lord — through repentance and trusting him.

The last passage is 1 Peter 5:6-9, listen again for those common themes, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares**

for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your

brotherhood throughout the world.” The world and Satan and our own flesh put things before us to cause us to think better of ourselves, we are more righteous, we chose to become anxious, but how are we told to fight? By resisting the devil. How do we resist the devil? By drawing near to our God. By refusing that false message of our own righteousness. By admitting our sin and our own propensity to wander. The emphasis here is on our Lord — his power, his might, what he has accomplished for sinners like us, our forever relationship with him. We cast all our anxieties on him. We know — no one ever cared for us like our Lord. He proved it on the cross. Our problem is with all the problems we tend to doubt it, and when we doubt it, that is not a spirit problem, but a spiritual problem?

Think of it because we are all here this morning, and all of us are battling something. The problem with many of us is we are battling first and foremost on the wrong battlefield. We are convinced that the greatest problem we have is not internal and not external. The greatest difficulty is my spouse. You can feel the anger and frustration, and the ability to say and feel like you want to shout, “that’s not fair.” It might be with your relationship with your children especially your adult children. It might be with all the “what if” questions you have, and you are trying to not only answer them but have absolute clarity and control of everything.

Do you feel overwhelmed? It can be devastating as we see in our text we are fighting the wrong battle and never seem to be getting anywhere. And Satan does want to discourage you. Where can I start? Here it is, listen to this verse again, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** Our Jesus cares for you. He is sovereign and you are not. Turn from your control and sin to trusting in him. He really does care for you. Our Jesus died to give you life. This is only a primer on spiritual warfare, but praise God for the One who has won the battle for us. We can now draw near to him.