



## Lesson 1 – Welcome to the War

Imagine a man wakes up sleepily, rolls out of bed, yawns, and then slowly makes his way to the kitchen. He mumbles about the importance of getting coffee in him quick and opens the door he thinks will take him to the kitchen. Instead, he finds himself standing outside in his pajamas, because he suddenly remembers he's not at home, he's at a barracks. And he's a soldier in the middle of a war. And there's an active battle going on at that very moment. As explosions rock the ground around him, his commanding officer comes over screaming that he needs to get dressed, asking him why he is awake so late, and demanding he get to his post immediately. "But what about my coffee?!" yells the annoyed soldier.

The mental image of a soldier standing in their pajamas in the middle of a battlefield while war rages around them is a somewhat ridiculous picture. It's hard not to laugh at the very thought of it. And yet, for many believers, this is their daily experience. A war rages around them all day for their soul and the souls of their family, friends, and neighbors, and they are mainly unaware. We are starting a series on answering hard questions, but we need to start that series by realizing that the hard questions we face are more than curious intellectual challenges and puzzles, they are rockets fired by an enemy that hates God, hates us, and wants to see everything ruined.

***Why do we so often forget that we are in the middle of a raging war?***

***How can we keep ourselves sensitive to this truth?***

In this series, we are going to be studying the topic of apologetics. Apologetics is the study of defending the faith. One of the dangers of studying apologetics is that it can sometimes become a study on debating techniques. "Say this," or "Don't say that." "Here's a ten-step process for asking questions, pointing out a spiritual need, and leaving someone with the gospel before they even know what hit them!" While giving practical counsel about how to answer questions is appropriate, we must never lose sight of the fact that there is a war going on. Our goal is not to prove that we are right, because the real battle isn't primarily a battle of wits. The real battle is a battle over the soul, and it's a battle that is being fought in the heart and not just the mind. In this lesson we will focus on the spiritual dimension of sharing our faith before we discuss more practical thoughts about answering challenging questions.

***Why does it matter that we are not just trying to win an argument, but ultimately change a heart?***

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## **We are in a Spiritual War**

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The Bible frequently uses the imagery of war and battle to describe our new life in Christ. We face a real enemy who wants us destroyed, and we seek to rescue those who are being held captive by him without even knowing it. In this first section, we will work through what our spiritual enemy looks like and in our next section we will see how we can overcome him.

### **We face a spiritual foe (Ephesians 6:10-12)**

The nature of this war is not physical, but spiritual. We live in a culture where the spiritual is often ignored or minimized, but Scripture is very clear that the spiritual is real.

#### ***Why do you think Christians today tend to ignore the spiritual world?***

The Bible doesn't give us a detailed picture of how it is that these dark forces influence the world. We are told that Satan is a liar (John 8:44), that he is in control of the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), and that he commands an army of spiritual forces of darkness (Ephesians 6:10-12). Yet what exactly "spiritual battle" looks like is tough to fully describe.

#### ***How would knowing that we are fighting a spiritual war change the way we think about our evangelism and apologetics?***

### **We face a cunning foe (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)**

Satan launched his first attack against humanity by lying. Genesis describes the devil as "subtle" [i.e. "crafty"] (Genesis 3:1) because it is through lies and deception that Satan advances his cause (cf 2 Corinthians 4:4). 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 describes our spiritual battle as pulling down strong holds of "imagination... and every high thing that exalteth itself against God," and as "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." In 2 Corinthians Paul was facing false teachers who were trying to discredit Paul and were using deceptive arguments to do so. Paul's response would be to address such wrong thinking through the weapons that God had provided. As one commentator put it, "Satan holds [the Corinthians'] minds hostage, and Paul is prepared to fight a pitched battle to liberate them."<sup>1</sup>

#### ***How is it that Satan is able to keep people trapped with lies today? Can you think of any examples?***

#### ***How can we help people break free of the lies Satan tells them?***

Although we have been careful to emphasize that the problems people have go beyond merely wrong thinking, at the same time we must realize that wrong thinking is a big part of the problem. People have been blinded by Satan, they are spiritually ignorant and deceived. When we do battle for the truth, we are fighting against the lies of the devil.

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<sup>1</sup> David Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, page 437.

### **We face a defeated foe (Colossians 2:15)**

When Israel went to conquer Canaan, God gave them an impressive promise: He told them that every place that the sole of their feet stood was land that God had given to them (Joshua 1:3). This is important because it means that in a real sense the victory was already won, it simply needed to be claimed. Similarly, the Bible teaches that the battle we do with the forces of darkness is not a battle whose end is uncertain. We know who wins: Christ wins. In fact, Christ has won.

Colossians 2:15 teaches that Christ “spoiled” principalities and powers, that He defeated them and turned them into spoils of war and triumphed over them. Through His death Jesus destroyed the one who has power over death, as Hebrews 2:14 reminds us. Revelation 19 paints a picture for us of Armageddon, the final battle where Christ will come and destroy the enemy before He sets up His earthly kingdom. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that through His death and resurrection Jesus overcame the powers of darkness, and now it’s just a matter of time.

***How does recognizing the fact that we face a defeated foe help us in our battle?***

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## **The Weapons of Our War**

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So what does all of this mean for our apologetics? How do we fight in this war? What weapons should we be using? There will be opportunities for answering hard questions, but answering hard questions will not change someone’s mind and it will not release them from the grip of the devil. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, and He does that through prayer and the power of the Word.

### **The Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)**

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the stakes they are facing whenever they seek to share the gospel. Satan himself is at work in the world blinding people so that they don’t see the truth and beauty in the gospel. The solution is not simply clearer logic or better arguments, because the root problem isn’t intellectual, it’s spiritual.

***What solution to this problem does Paul give in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6?***

You and I don’t have what it takes to face the devil head on in a battle over someone’s soul. We’re hopelessly outmatched. But God can break through and get people to see who are spiritually blind. God can bring people who are spiritually dead back to life (cf Ephesians 2:1-5). Although Paul doesn’t specifically mention the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, he has just finished discussing the importance of the Spirit’s work in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, and Scripture teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes and brings us the knowledge of God (cf 1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

***What role do you think we have in the work of the Spirit changing people’s minds and opening their hearts?***

### **The Word of God (Hebrews 4:12)**

If it is the Holy Spirit who does the convicting, then how does He do it? The Holy Spirit could just zap someone as if a lightning bolt suddenly hit them so that they know the truth. But that's not the way the Spirit has chosen to work. The normal course is for Him to use the Word of God to change minds. It is through the living and powerful Bible that God brings conviction (Hebrews 4:12). God's Word is what makes people wise to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15) and it is through the foolish message of Christ crucified that God's power is seen in bringing lost people to Christ. The Bible warns us that God uses a foolish message to bring people to salvation so that no one can boast in their own wisdom, and therefore we should simply trust the power of God rather than the wisdom of man (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

***In what ways might we begin to trust in the wisdom of man rather than in the Word of God?***

Dr. Whitcomb testified to this principle powerfully in his testimony. He recounts a time when as a young believer he watched a seasoned campus Bible leader witness to a student. The student brought up a challenging question, but rather than simply get into a battle of wits, the gracious teacher directed the conversation back to the young man's real need – which was Christ. Dr. Whitcomb notes the impact that this simple encounter had on him and the way it changed his thinking about sharing his faith:

“My problem [his wrong understanding of apologetics] was basically two-fold. I had underestimated the depth of man's rebellion against God, and I was unaware of the absolutely crucial part which the word of God must have, through the convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, in bringing sinful men to Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Remember, this is coming from one of the founding figures of the young earth creationist movement! Yet despite the careful work done on the question of the age of the earth, Dr. Whitcomb realized that careful arguments don't change minds, only God's Spirit through God's Word can do that.

***How does the fact that God's Spirit uses God's Word impact the way we think about apologetics and evangelism?***

### **Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-4)**

Paul asked that prayer be made for rulers and authorities because desires that all people be saved. Based on everything that we've seen so far in this lesson, this point is a natural conclusion. We should use God's Words and we should be in prayer! Lookup the following passages to see what the Spirit can do for us, and what we should be praying for:

- Ephesians 1:17
- Ephesians 6:19
- Colossians 4:3
- Colossians 4:4

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<sup>2</sup> “Conversion Testimony and Letters of Dr. John C. Whitcomb,” page 3.

If Paul the Apostle was praying for wisdom, boldness, opportunity, and clarity, how much more should we! God has tasked us with fighting as foot soldiers in His army, sharing the gospel with a lost and dying world. We need His help, and when we realize that we will be forced to our knees in dependence on Him.

People have questions, and God has answers. But the greatest need of people is not to have their questions answered or even to be shown that what they think is wrong. People's greatest need is salvation. Satan has lied to people and only God can break through the deception. Yet God has chosen to work through us as we prayerfully share His Word. Along the way will we find ourselves wrestling with challenging questions and seeking to provide answers, but we must never forget that this is much more than two people having a friendly intellectual argument. This is a war for the souls of men and women, and we are on the front lines.