

## Chapter 8

### In Heavenly Places

*He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*

I firmly believe that most of what the church sees as spiritual warfare is, to a greater part fairly ineffective. I do not wish to sound negative, but it is not enough to have an evening 'shouting at the devil' and then to proclaim there is an open heaven over our town, community, city or country. It feels good to shout at him and it is not completely ineffective, but the great claims made are rarely substantiated by physical evidence. We read in Ephesians 6:12 that:

*'We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age and against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'*

It is good to know what the principalities and powers over our areas and countries are. I have spoken about this in Kenya to many pastors and ministry leaders and generally they agree that one of the major spiritual powers over Kenya is a spirit of division. Its effect can be seen at almost every level of Kenyan society – in politics, the tribalism and clashes that erupt from time to time and very clearly in the church. I have known many churches hold their meetings of spiritual warfare to cast out the spirit of division, but it remains. Why? Because in Kenya the division in the church is so strong that it has given the spirit of division a hold. No matter how much it is rebuked by the church it stays because the church is so divided itself. It is necessary to 'bind the strong man'. (Matthew 12:30) This is not done by shouting and rebuking. The purpose of these next two chapters is to help us understand how we can wrestle effectively and overcome.

Firstly, we need to understand that no man is our enemy. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. It may seem to some difficult to understand, but if you are a Christian, Osama bin Laden is not your enemy. He may be an enemy of your country. He may be opposed to and stand against everything that you hold as important, but he is flesh and blood and not your enemy. Your enemy is the spiritual forces that operate through him. He is a man for whom Jesus died. Instead of adding to the myriad curses that have been spoken against him can you imagine the testimony in the world if he became born again! Do not misunderstand me. His acts are evil. His mind is twisted. At the time of writing he has not yet been caught. My prayer is that he is brought to justice, but that does not also stop me praying for him. If I am to be serious about the 'always' of Colossians 4:6 and put it into practice then even what I say about Osama bin Laden should be with grace.

A man named Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute, arrest and even kill Christians. He had a supernatural encounter with Jesus and was converted. He became the Apostle Paul. The testimony of the conversion of this fanatical opponent of Christ was a major factor in turning the Roman world upside down for Jesus. Could not a similar miraculous conversion of a man like Bin Laden have the same effect on the

Muslim World? Remember Babel? Nothing shall be withheld from brethren when they dwell together in unity!

I have heard many people speak against Muslims in the current political climate and with the greatest threat to peace coming from the Muslim world it is not surprising. I know it is not politically correct to say this, but Islam is not a religion of peace. The Koran in fact says that a man who kills an infidel (a non-Muslim), especially a Christian or a Jew, will receive a greater reward in heaven. Mohammed was a fighting man and Islam was founded in warfare and fear. Applying the principle of sowing and reaping makes it inevitable that it will reap the violence with which it was sown. However, Muslim men and women are not our enemy but the spiritual forces behind Islam. Jesus died for the sins of every Muslim man and woman. If we treat them as an enemy how will they be saved? However, do not be deceived. The Allah of the Koran is not our Jehovah God. The character and nature and writings of the Allah of the Koran do not reveal the character, nature and writings of Jehovah, the Living God.

In our spiritual warfare we need to stop fighting flesh and blood and see our enemy as spiritual. Our battle is not here on earth with conventional weapons, but in heavenly places with spiritual weapons.

When Jesus was taken up to heaven he instructed the disciples to be His witnesses. We have seen how he sent them out with His authority. He said:

*“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

Notice firstly, they were not to begin to witness until they had received spiritual power. They needed spiritual power for spiritual work. We shall see the place of the church - the church that Jesus is building, is in heavenly places. Secondly, just as there is a progression in the way that the church is to witness on earth, so there is in spiritual places. Start in Jerusalem (your home area), then go to Judea and Samaria (your country) and then to the rest of the world. It is the same in spiritual warfare. We want to change the world, and yet we have not begun to fight the spiritual battle in our own home area.

When I was a pastor in south east London we had several meetings where we battled in spiritual warfare, but they were always for our local area. In the last chapter I told the story of the blasphemous blessing of relationships. As a church we were not happy that such practices should happen in our area. I worked at trying to obey what the Lord had told me about building a relationship with that church. As a result we held several meetings in their building. We were a new church and then, as now, rented buildings for our meetings. The leader of this church allowed us to use his church building for prayer meetings. What he did not know was that we used them for spiritual warfare. We did not pray against any individual but we did pray against the spiritual forces that were at work in and through that church, commanding them to leave our area in the name of Jesus. As far as I am aware it was only our congregation that knew of these meetings at the time. However, it was only a few months later that we heard that the two men who had been involved in the service of blessing had

moved right out of the area. A short time later the leader of the church found another post, again well away from our home area.

We did not clear England of homosexuality, or even south east London, but we did win a local battle. I cannot say our area is clear but I believe that we battled and won. We started in our own area of spiritual responsibility.

I was raised in Charlton, in south London and the first time I went to a football match it was naturally to Charlton Athletic. I will not say that I am a fan, but I do follow their progress! One evening there was a home match. I do not go to games these days but I was walking home that evening at the time when people were leaving the match. I did not witness any physical violence that day, but there was trouble in the air. I discerned that there were heavy spiritual forces of violence, anger and aggression. They were almost tangible. I decided that we should not have to put up with these things in our streets – in our area - and so the next evening I went to The Valley, the home ground of the club, and entered into spiritual warfare against the spiritual forces of violence, anger and aggression. At the end of the season the club was in financial trouble and left the area and shared a ground with another south London team. Even recently someone reminded me I had ‘prayed the club out of the area’. I did not do that. I did pray the spiritual forces attached to the club out of the area. They went and took the club with them.

In 1993 the club came back to the area and to The Valley again. I have no problem with that. The club came back but the violence, anger and aggression did not. The club is not perfect, but it is certainly more family orientated and is at the forefront of kicking racism out of football. It is currently having a measure of success in the English premiership and the pastor of our church is now the pastor of the players and staff. There are several Christians on the staff. It is another warfare ‘success’ in our local area. I believe it is in our home areas that the church needs to begin to rediscover how to battle in heavenly places. As we strengthen at home we can begin, in unity with other churches, to take more ground.

The book of Ephesians is a book about spiritual warfare. The climax of the book is the battle. Basic steps lead to a maturity that will take the church into its appointed battle against spiritual forces. The church is in a battle whether it likes it or not. Part of the reason the church lacks the power it should have is that it does not know, or does not want to know it has an active enemy – the devil. If we are not active against the enemy he will have success after success against the church. Thankfully, in Jesus Christ we will have the final victory but the church is losing battle after battle because it refuses to fight, or does not want to fight or does not know how to fight. The book of Ephesians teaches the church where it stands (in Christ) and progressively brings it to the point where it is ready to put on the armour and enter into the battle. Many churches get as far as putting on the armour and then do not fight. They put it on defensively but never advance. They are ‘holding the fort’ when they should be storming the gates of Hades.

I have found five steps that will help the church in spiritual warfare. They are five progressive places in Ephesians where the phrase ‘heavenly places’ is used. As we follow these steps we will see not only where we stand but will be prepared for battle.

Step 1: Blessings in Heavenly Places. (Ephesians 1:3)

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

We have seen that before God created Adam He prepared a beautiful place for him. The Garden of Eden had everything Adam and Eve could ever have needed. When it was completed God stooped to the ground and made Adam from the dust of the earth and gave him spiritual life as He breathed His life giving Spirit into him. First came the environment; fitted for the task of ruling the earth and subduing it.

At creation, when God breathed His life into Adam, he was empowered and became a living spirit. On the cross, when Jesus died He destroyed all the work of the devil. The church was empowered at Pentecost, but I believe there was a time while Jesus was still on earth that the church became a living being. I believe that it was in the locked room after the resurrection of Jesus that the church came to life and was born.

*Jesus said to them (the disciples), "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you." And when He had said this, **He breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit."***

Just as Adam became a living being on earth in the Garden of Eden as God breathed upon Him (Genesis 2:7) so the disciples were born again as Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit as He breathed upon them. I believe this to be the birth of the church. As Adam was to rule on the earth, so the church is to rule; both on earth and in heavenly places. The authority that Jesus gave to the church was on earth and in heaven.

God has blessed us in Jesus Christ and prepared a place for the church and filled it with every spiritual blessing. Where? In heavenly places. The realm of activity of the church is on earth as given to Adam and in heavenly places as given to Christ.

Step 2: Jesus in heavenly places. (Ephesians 1:20)

*The working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ Jesus when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.*

Jesus said "I go to prepare a place for you." Having prepared a place full of every spiritual blessing, we now find that the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christ Himself, is raised up and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in *heavenly places*. He is seated far above principality and power and might and dominion. He is above all things.

Furthermore, we read in verse 22 that God has put all things under the feet of Jesus and has given Him to be the head over all things to the church **which is His body**. We have a picture building of a complete man made up of Christ and the church. He is the head, the church is His body and everything is under His feet. The church is only

complete in Him. Jesus is the fullness that fills the church with all we need for the battle. In Him we are above all principalities and powers and might and dominion. In Him, and through the church, we have authority over every power in heaven and on earth. We see Jesus in heavenly places.

Step 3: The church in heavenly places together. (Ephesians 2:6)

*But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive **together** with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up **together** in the heavenly places.*

The third step is that Jesus, having gone ahead of us, has raised the church together into the *heavenly places*. When a man is born again he is added to the church. Now, complete in Him, the church is in the area of the heavenly places where it can fulfil the task that Jesus gave to it.

We have seen that when Jesus went to heaven He gave authority in heaven and on earth to the church. Today, for the most part, the church now operates on earth. It has become worldly and spends a great deal of its time and resources with earthly concerns, and buildings and finance etc. The church spends a large part of its time in earthly pursuits and fails to exercise the authority it should in a spiritual way.

The church has lost its understanding of the spiritual authority it has in heavenly places. This is the true area of our warfare. Many interpret and subsequently act as if the Bible says that we *will be* raised into heavenly places. The truth is that it tells us that we *have been* raised up. The church should be a supernatural church, full of the power and authority Jesus exercised and passed on to it when He ascended into heaven. In many churches the word is greatly revered but not acted upon. The radical message of Jesus, of the Kingdom of God, of the Gospel, has been studied, dissected, watered down and mostly lost. I have been in churches where the Bible is led in procession but not acted upon. In theological colleges and Bible schools the word is judged when we should use it to judge ourselves, our own motives. Many modern theological clowns would have us believe that signs and wonders are scholastic blunders and treat the miracle birth with cynical mirth. May the Lord have mercy on their unbelieving souls.

The church has been raised into heavenly places, given spiritual power to fight spiritual battles and to witness not just on earth but in heavenly places.

Step 4: The church a witness in heavenly places. (Ephesians 3:10)

*Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*

This step shows us the effect of the church being in heavenly places. Jesus said that the church was to be a witness in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The church has followed these instructions and the Gospel has indeed gone out through all the earth. Not many realise that the church is also to be a witness in heavenly places.

It says in I Corinthians 2:7-8 that the rulers of this age, both physical and spiritual rulers, did not understand the wisdom of God when they crucified the Lord. If they had understood they would not have crucified Him. Satan thought that he was gaining the victory when Jesus was crucified. He did not understand the wisdom of God that it would be his defeat. For mankind it was the greatest victory in history.

The very existence of the church is a witness to principalities and powers to this wisdom and to the power of God. Every time a man or woman accepts Jesus it witnesses in heavenly places to the wisdom of God. Every time someone is delivered or healed in the name of Jesus it is a witness. Salvation is a supernatural act. It translates a man or woman into heavenly places. The church should be a supernatural organism. It should be more than merely a temporal, earthly church. The more distant in time that the church gets from the New Testament church and the purity of unity in the early church, the more it has abandoned its supernatural strength. It will be victorious because Jesus will give it the victory but in these days it is failing to take hold of the supernatural nature that Jesus has given it.

Step 5: The warfare in heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:11-12)

*Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Here is the climax and final purpose of the church being raised into heavenly places. There is a war going on. We are involved in a fight whether we know it or not and whether we want to be in it or not. I have heard theologians say that there are no principalities and powers and rulers over cities and countries. Preachers are afraid to preach about them because they might seem old fashioned. Scientists tell us there are no such things as demons and spirits. That sin and certain demonic sicknesses are in our genetic makeup. Psychiatrists try to explain away demonic activity and explain supernatural happenings in terms of our make up. All these 'theories' have been taken on board by the church and a large part of the church has stopped fighting.

The church says that it is rich (in understanding?) and has become wealthy (in knowledge?) and has need of nothing – and it does not know that it is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked! (Revelation 3:17). The devil has attacked the church with knowledge and worldly wisdom and has robbed it of the supernatural power of the word of God.

The idea of spiritual warfare has become anathema to a large part of the church today. It believes that it involves shouting at the devil which it sees as primitive and unsophisticated and therefore has stepped back from spiritual warfare altogether. However, it cannot step out of the battle. It is in a fight and needs to learn to fight back.