

Section I

Introduction and Overview of this Subject

The Lord wants the members of His Church to know about, and deal with, the evil forces which are in our world. Satan seeks to deceive and destroy the followers of Christ. The evil forces of Satan will attack believers. Believers can count on this fact! Believers must be prepared to resist these attacks and to defend themselves against the influences of evil to which we are exposed every day.

Believers do not need to be afraid of evil forces if they maintain a close relationship with Jesus Christ and follow the instructions of the Scriptures.

The devil is not concerned about non-believers. Non-believers live in spiritual darkness. They are blind to the truth of Jesus Christ. They are in bondage to their sins, separated from God, under God's wrath and condemnation, and face an eternal death. See II Corinthians 4:3-4; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 3:9-18.

The conflicts between individuals, races, and nations are caused by, and driven by, Satan. Satan has controlled the desires and ambitions of people since the beginning of human history. This control is over the political structures, the cultures, economic systems, and religious systems of the world. Satan wants to keep control over as many people as possible. He becomes upset when people under his control consider faith in Jesus Christ, and he becomes very angry when the followers of Jesus Christ evangelize non-believers and thereby bring the glory of Jesus Christ into his dark evil world.

As was stated earlier, believers will be attacked by evil forces in efforts to minimize the impact of the testimonies and witness of believers. Ideally, Satan would like to completely divert the attention of believers away from Jesus Christ and the purposes of God. The followers of Christ need to be aware of Satan's techniques (see II Corinthians 2:11). Satan uses temptations to get believers to disobey God and do sinful actions. He creates doubts in order to get believers to lose their confidence and soften their beliefs. He uses worries and anxieties to turn the thoughts of believers onto themselves and away from God. He places images in the minds of believers to get them to fantasize about physical pleasures. There are appeals to pride, and to desires for greater personal comforts and possessions.

Satan has hundreds of techniques that he uses to tamper with the spiritual and personal relationships of believers, and with family life, emotional and physical health, personal priorities, and ministry activities. Satan's strategy is to divert the followers of Jesus Christ from the calling and purposes of God, and he is willing to try any evil, devious, malicious, and sneaky way necessary to accomplish this.

A Believer Experiences Spiritual Conflict in Three Main Ways

The Supernatural Aspects of Spiritual Warfare

This form of spiritual warfare is described in Ephesians 6:12 "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." Rulers, authorities, powers, and other forces have "personality," which means that they can think, scheme, devise plans, and set traps for people in order to ensnare people in their evil ways. Because they are not limited to physical (flesh and blood) characteristics, they have powers which far exceed human abilities. However, it is possible for believers to overcome these forces of evil because Jesus Christ is the Lord over everything and every creature. See Colossians 1:18-20; Ephesians 1:20-21.

The Social / Cultural / Political / Economic Aspects of Spiritual Conflict

This form of conflict comes from the people and conditions of the world. See I John 2:15-17. Ungodly values permeate the cultures, religions, and nations of the world. There is a world system which influences and controls the thinking and activities of people. Most people, including believers, are unaware of how much influence the world has on them. The world can draw believers into conformity to the desires, habits, customs, etc. of the people who live around them. Even church fellowships can be influenced by the culture in which they exist.

Believers can be as unaware of the environment in which they live as a fish is unaware that it lives in water! This is because the world we live in is under the control of Satan. All aspects of human behavior has been affected by his influence. His control is manifested through many world systems, such as individualism, secularism, humanism, materialism, relativism, etc. These "isms" have created an environment that envelops humanity and conditions our ways of thinking. The more that people are exposed to and enveloped into the ways of the world — to the wickedness and godlessness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness — the more difficult it is for them to discern good from evil.

God wants His people to understand that they became citizens of His kingdom as soon as they were born again, and as citizens of the kingdom of God they do not belong to the world even though they live in the world. The citizen of heaven must obey and follow a different set of standards than non-believers who follow the ways of the world. It is difficult for some believers to be counter-cultural — to go against the ways of the world — while living in the midst of the world, but this is what God expects of us. Romans 12:1-2 and Colossians 3:1-2 are important verses for believers.

Our physical world was created by God for His glory. Satan and his evil forces usurped territory which rightfully belongs to God. When sin was introduced into our world, not only humans, but all of creation, became subject to the decay and death of sin (see Romans 8:19-21). Here on earth, believers have the responsibility to invade the enemy's territory with the message of the Gospel in order to liberate people from their bondage to sin and evil. The devil is reluctant to yield his grip on people and territory. Jesus said to His followers, "The world hates me; the world will also hate you." However, Jesus also stated that victory over sin and evil forces would be possible when His followers put their trust and confidence in God's power as expressed through the Holy Spirit.

The Personal Aspects of Spiritual Conflict

This form of conflict is described in Romans 7. Paul said, (v15) "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I do not want, I do. ... (v18) I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ... (v22) In my inner being I delight in God's law; (v23) but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."

We have a sin nature. In Scripture this nature is called the "old life," "flesh," "natural man". Romans chapters 5 and 6 explain the characteristics of the sin nature. Before a person accepts Christ as Savior, the human personality is controlled by Satan. The human personality includes the reasoning, emotive, and volitional aspects of a person, as well as the physical (because of the biochemical interactions). In more common words, these are the mind, emotions, will, and body of a person.

After a person has received the Holy Spirit, the old ways of thinking and doing, which have been patterned by the old nature, is to be superseded by the new self, which is a fresh spiritual identity empowered by the Holy Spirit (See Ephesians 4:22-24). Even after giving their lives to Christ, believers deal with a mixture of old habits, thought, and temptations alongside the new life of the Spirit. Natural instincts (such as appetites, desires, sexual drive, avoidance of pain, need to communicate, survival, etc., and the biochemical processes of the body) remain the same for believers and non-believers, but for the believer these instincts can and must be controlled. The control of the Holy Spirit over the natural instincts is the area where spiritual conflict occurs. See Galatians 5:16-25.

Note: an unsaved person does not have the power to resist temptation. Believers, however, have the potential to turn away from temptation because God's Spirit indwells the believer and helps him/her to be obedient to God's will.

Important: The Emphasis of This Manual

The emphasis of this curriculum is on the ways believers can overcome the spiritual pressures they will face in life.

My Prayer for Those Who Study This Subject

This prayer is in Paul's letter to the Church in Colossae.

Colossians 1:9-14

I am "asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will"

so that

"you may live a life worthy of the Lord," and "you may please Him in every way."

There are four activities by which you can "live a life worthy of the Lord" and "please Him in every way." You must

1. "bear fruit in every good work"
2. "grow in the knowledge of God"
3. "be strengthened with all power" (so that you "may have great endurance and patience"), and
4. "joyfully give thanks" because you are qualified "to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."

You are "qualified to share in the inheritance: because you have been rescued by the Father (from the dominion of darkness)

and

Brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the Son.

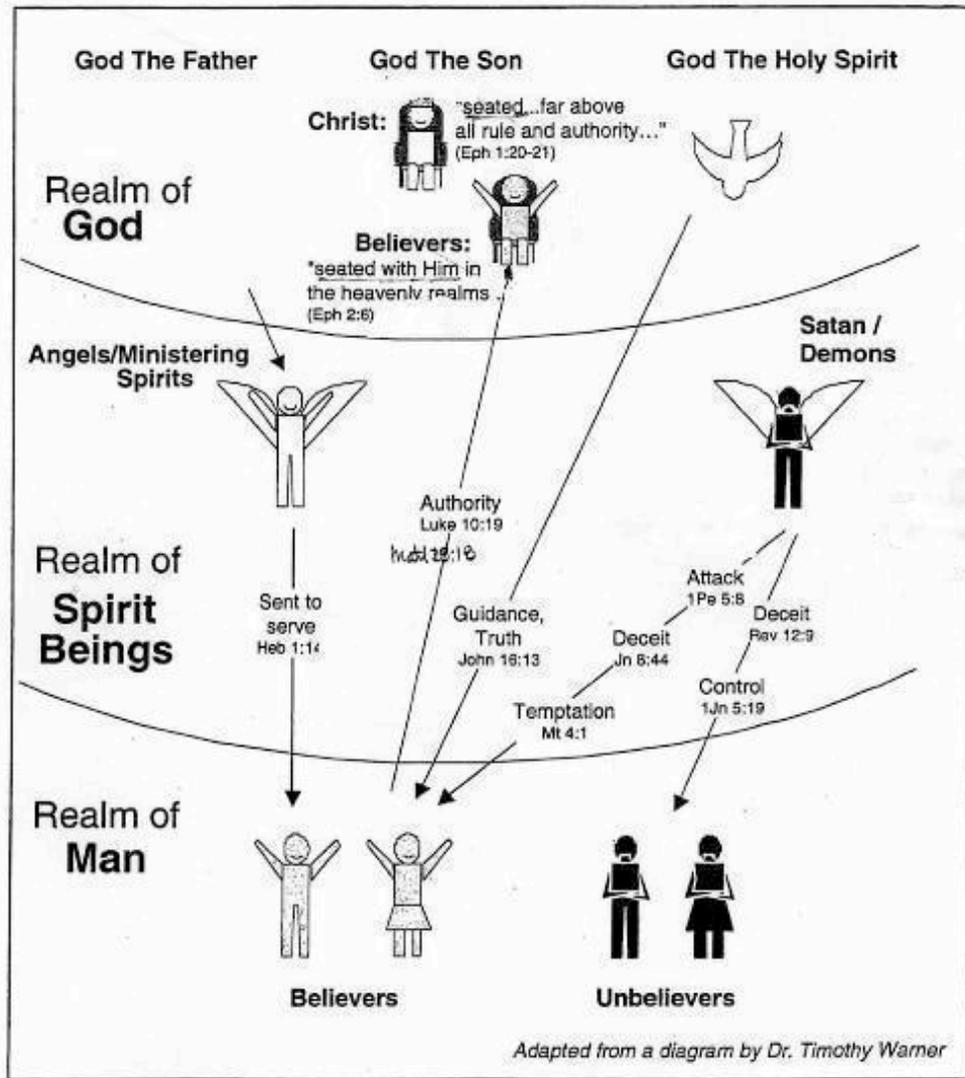
Colossians 2:6-10

The key requirement is to live under the Lordship of Christ Jesus (v6). All the fullness of the Godhead lives in Christ (v9), and all the fullness of Christ Jesus has been given to believers (v10)! Fullness means that Christ Jesus "is the head over every power and authority."

Colossians 3:1-2

Believers are expected to "Set their hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God," and to "Set their minds on things above, not on earthly things."

The Description of the Believer's Security in Christ



Explanation for the diagram

There are three realms:

1. The realm where God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is unique as Creator of the other two realms.
2. The realm where all the supernatural created beings exist. Supernatural beings include the holy heavenly beings which have access to the Godhead; and Satan, fallen angels, demons, and what Ephesians 6:12 describes as “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers of the dark world,” and “spiritual forces of evil.”
3. The realm of mankind.

Benefits to Believers

Believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (see Ephesians 2:6). This is a secure position because Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion,” and hence out of the reach of evil spiritual forces. Furthermore, Jesus Christ has given believers His authority to use in ministry on earth (see Matthew 28:18).

God the Father has assigned His angels to be the special protectors and helpers of believers (see Psalm 91, especially verses 9-12). Hebrews 1:7 explains that angels are God’s servants. They are compared to the wind and “flames of fire.” People cannot see the wind, but they can see what the wind does — it moves the leaves on trees, and stirs up dust — but they cannot actually see the wind. In the same way, believers can sometimes see what the angels do, but very few people have ever seen angels. Hebrews 1:14 explains that “angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” Putting all this information together, we learn that angels are sent by God to serve the needs of believers!

The third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, also helps believers. Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-17, 26; and 16:7-15. The indwelling Holy Spirit, who is also called the Spirit of Truth, is the believer’s Guide during the years of life here on earth.

The conclusion is that believers are protected by, and guided by, all three members of the Godhead. There is security when a person places himself/herself into the hands of God.

The Activities of Satan.

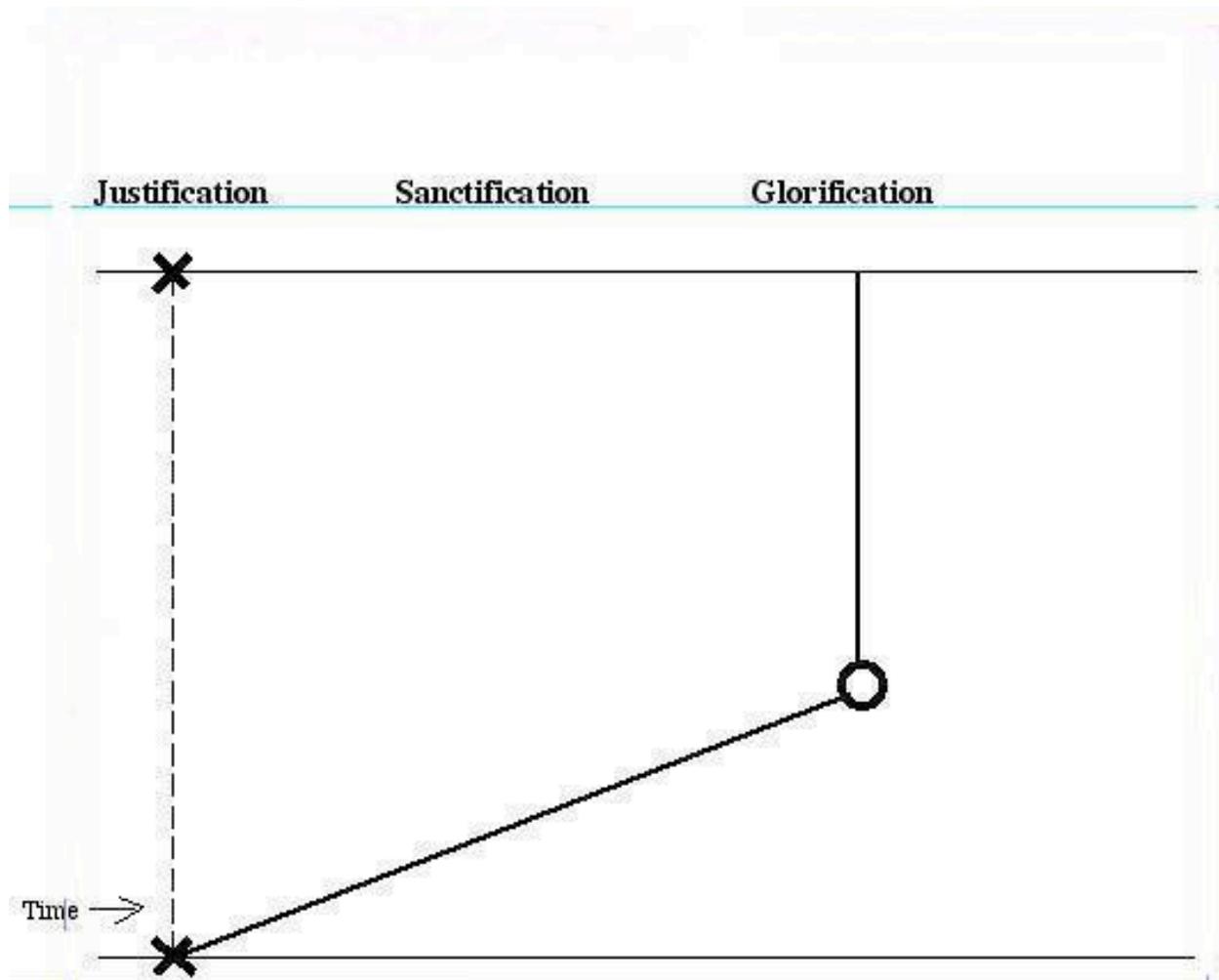
Satan does not dwell in the realm of God, although Scripture indicates that he once had access to the presence of God (Job 1:6; 2:1). His status is no greater than that of an angel. Satan is not very concerned about unbelievers. They are under his authority and control (see I John 5:16). They live in spiritual darkness and are in bondage to their sins.

Satan's energies are directed toward believers. He wants to neutralize their testimonies as the followers of Jesus, and to hinder their service to Jesus. Satan attacks believers in many ways. He understands the spiritually weak areas of each individual life, and uses temptations to get believers to disobey God. He tries to get believers to live by sight and not by faith, to turn the thoughts of believers onto themselves and away from God, to fantasize about physical pleasures, to seek for greater personal comforts and possessions, to seek personal power, position, possessions.

The Benefits of God Are Greater Than the Benefits of Satan

The conclusion is that the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) provide many more, as well as better, protections and resources to believers than Satan has weapons to use against them. Believers can live securely under the high level authority of God.

The Biblical View of God's Plan for the Believer



Explanation of Diagram

The top line represents the level where God exists. The bottom line represents the level where

people exist. In actuality, there is an infinite distance between these two levels because God is holy and people are sinners.

The “X” on the bottom line indicates the point in time when a person acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and is “born again” by the Spirit of God. At that instant, the individual becomes a member of God’s family (John 1:12-13) and the believer becomes a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6). This is the believer’s spiritual position even though his/her physical presence remains on earth. The theological term for this change is “justification.”

The new believer is called “a babe in Christ” and “a child of God.” Spiritual babies are expected to grow spiritually in the same way that physical babies are expected to grow physically. From the moment of justification, the new believer is expected to have a normal spiritual development; that is, to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to begin to live according to the behavioral standards of Scripture. This process of spiritual growth and maturity is indicated by the line which slants upward. This process of growth is described in Romans 8:28-30 Those “who have been called according to his (God’s) purpose ... he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” The theological term for this process is “sanctification.”

The “O” in the diagram indicates the moment when physical death occurs. At this moment the believer enters the presence of the Lord and the believer’s position (granted at the time of justification) becomes reality. The theological term for this change is “glorification.”

There is Victory Over Sin at Each Stage in the Believer’s Life.

Justification — The justice of God was satisfied because Jesus met the righteous demands of the Father (justification). In addition, the penalty of sin was paid (redemption) when Jesus died on the cross, and the sinner was reconciled to God because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice (atonement). See Romans 3:21-26

Sanctification — The power and influence of sin in the believer’s life can be controlled by the indwelling presence in the believer of the Holy Spirit. See Romans 8:5-14 and Galatians 5:16-25.

Glorification — The presence and activity of sin in the life of the believer ends at the time of physical death. Sin functions only in the physical realm. See I Corinthians 15:50-57.

God's Work and the Believer's Responsibility

Scripture very clearly differentiates between what God does and what the believer must do in the progression of salvation. God takes the initiative throughout the progression of salvation. The Father sent His Son, Jesus was willing to die as a sacrifice for the sins of people, the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to people who are dead in sins. "Redemption," "substitutionary atonement," and "justification" have been made available to sinners because God did everything necessary, on His own initiative, that was required for salvation. See Romans 5:6-8; Gal 1:3. This was God's plan from before creation. See I Peter 1:20.

God also had a plan for the specific people who would become His followers. Scripture states that God "draws" such individuals to Himself (see John 6:44). There are several theological terms which describe God's work of "drawing" people to Himself: "called," "predestined," "election," "foreknowledge." See Romans 8:28-30; I Peter 1:1-2; II Peter 1:10. The point is that a person only comes to faith when God takes the initiative. God, who understands the end from the beginning, determines who will receive faith and who does not. See Eph 1:4-14. All this precedes the time when the sinner acknowledges Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (justification). The believer has no control over the circumstances which lead to justification.

Neither does the believer have any control over what happens with glorification. The moment of physical death is determined by God, and the circumstances of eternal life in the presence of God is controlled by God. We do not have very much information in Scripture about how our bodies become heavenly bodies; nor what it is like in the presence of God; nor how we will live throughout eternity. We have only a little information in Scripture concerning the characteristics of heaven. The Scriptures give us enough information about these things so that believers can have a basis of hope, but there are not many details. Frankly, it should not matter to us how God will accomplish our glorification. If we are willing to trust Him while we are here on earth, we should be willing to trust Him for eternity. God wants His people to trust Him regarding the future.

What is the Only Concern That Believers Need to Have?

Believers only need to be concerned about the quality of their lives between justification and glorification; that is, between the time they place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and when they go to be with the Lord. This is the period of sanctification. This is the period when they are expected to become more and more conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Scripture has an abundance of material to help the believer during the years here on earth. The emphasis in the New Testament epistles is on sanctification. The emphasis is on walking in the Spirit, on obedience to God and pleasing Him and living for His glory. This is the period of time when believers are confronted by the forces of evil, when these forces attempt to prevent believers from moving on toward spiritual maturity and "conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ."