**Fight and Pray**

 As we look at our nation and our world we find a culture of death. The horrible events of Newton, Connecticut, which occurred about three weeks prior to this writing, demonstrate how depraved man can be. While we all recognize the responsibility of the shooter we also understand that there is more to the incident than just one man gone insane. The bible tells us that unsaved men are essentially “pawns” of our common adversary. “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Eph. 2:1-3* We may not perfectly understand the degree to which the unbalanced man followed his own mind and how much he was guided by the prince of the power of the air; but to claim that Satan is not at the very least involved in and leading those Godless actions is to deny the scriptures. Certainly the actions in Connecticut fit into the “thief’s” pattern of behavior: *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10* The point is this: during these days all the talking heads are playing the blame game but none of them are stating the simple truth that we are in a spiritual war with a spiritual enemy who desires to do us harm both spiritually and physically. “*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.” Eph. 6:13*

 Our first problem is that we don’t really believe that we are in a war. We need to come to grips with the reality of the war we are in and have been in for 2000 years. Although the war is old, the actions of our enemy are becoming increasingly heinous. In my view we, as a whole, have done precious little to fight back, even though we are commanded to do so. “*Therefore submit 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.” Jas. 4:7-8.* Double minded, that’s us! We cry and bemoan Sandy Hook, but refuse to even attempt to do something about it. But what can we do? I am convinced that we are not depending on the power of Christ in the way we live nor in the way we pray. We mourn for a few weeks, then the news media moves on, and then we move on in lockstep obedience. If the war was physical instead of spiritual our actions would look like this: we get attacked, we complain, and then we retreat. What if we stopped retreating turned around and said, “Here I make my stand and by the power of Almighty God, and I will from this point forward resist the enemy.”? What if we begin to really pray and really live in an attitude of dependence on Christ who resides within us? What if, just as David ran toward Goliath, we begin to move toward the enemy instead of retreating? What if every school in this country were flooded with a tide of intercessory prayers? What if in a lifestyle of dependence on God we moved through our dark lost world like an army gathering the lost and protecting the innocent? Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if someone had been able to reach the Sandy Hook shooter with the saving message of Christ before that fateful day? I submit to you that we have no idea what God can do because our eyes are dimmed by our consistent dependence on ourselves instead of Him. “*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” 2 Chron. 16:9*

 If we are going to resist the devil we must first submit and draw near to God. We must understand that we have no power whatsoever in ourselves to effectively stand against the enemy. If we are actually going to be useful in the army of God we will, of necessity, need to come to God in a real and honest way. Our prayers will need to be different. For most of us today prayer is something we know we ought to do and something we practice more or less consistently, but in our prayers we rarely push through to get to the actual hindrances to our walk with God. I am not suggesting an increase in quantity but a dramatic change in quality. The sad truth is that way too often our “prayers” are simply religious exercises whose effect is to assuage our guilty conscience and to allow us to feel that we are okay with God; rather than real, heart-felt, honest, and totally surrendered requests and petitions. Simply put, our prayers need to be fundamentally changed toward complete honesty and reality. One old preacher was asked how long he prays. He said, “I pray till I’ve prayed.” What is your inner most dream? Tell it to God. Moreover, give it to God. Moreover give it up, lay it down, and look away from that most cherished dream. God may indeed fulfill that dream or He may not; just leave it with Him. If we do that we getting close to real prayer. How available are you to God? We sing the words: “Wherever He leads I’ll go.” We sing, “Thou art the potter I am the clay.” We think of ourselves as being available to God, but are we really? Are we willing to move from our dream home? Are we willing to be transformed into the image of Christ? Are we really?

 *God, what are You trying to show me? Where have I missed what You want for my life? God I’m so tired of just getting by. I’m sick of going through the motions. I long for the reality of Your life in my life. I know You love me, and I genuinely thank You for Your love, but do I love You? I want the reality of the Christian life. What is it in my life that is keeping me from simply being led by You? I want to move at Your command, in Your power, actually depending on You. God lead me to someone today who needs a word from You, give me the words to say, and give me the Holy Spirit unction to speak those words. You have promised me that out of my belly shall flow rivers of living water. You have promised me that I can now walk in newness of life. You promised that I would be a new creation. I want to be swept away by your “dreams” are, not mine. I want my heart to beat in response to Your heart. I want to live by your power, not by my wits. DEAR LORD PLEASE MAKE IT REAL IN MY LIFE.*

 Your prayer will be your own and will not follow a pattern. May I suggest that you speak honestly and quickly. Don’t try to choose your words. Open your heart and pour it out to God. Pour out the good and the bad. Don’t try to pray “spiritual sounding words”. I believe that in this way we might be getting closer to real prayer. The hindrance to prayer lies in us not God. We must be willing to face the issues that God brings before us. We must allow His Spirit to remove from us all bitterness, wrong ideas, and our plans that did not come from God. If we fail to get real with God we will never discover real prayer and we will be useless in the war that rages all around us.

 Let me give you this word of caution as you seek to get into the fight. You need to be rock solid sure of your standing before God, and very few Christians today are because the church barely teaches this anymore. The more seriously you resist the devil the more your adversary will bring up to you all of your old sins. He is called the accuser of the brethren for a reason. Consider this much quoted verse, “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” Isa. 1:18 Question: Is that verse true and real for you today? We must not relate to God’s love the way a love sick youngster relates to the love of his sweetheart. A youngster may resort to pulling petals off a flower; “She loves me, she loves me not, ….” We tend to do the same in our understanding of our relationship to God. “I’m clean, I’m unclean …” This oscillation is not good. Some people teach today that when we sin, (and we do sin because we still have a sin nature), God turns His back on us, and then when we repent and confess He turns back toward us, then we sin, He turns, we confess He turns back. That is a lot of turning for a God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow; with whom there no shadow of turning. It is my position that God turned His back on His Son once so that He would never need to turn His back on us. It would do us good if we could learn the meaning of one simple phrase: “It is finished.” I’m not saying that we deserve or have earned this state in which we stand, but according to God’s word we are perpetually clean before Him. I am not saying that it is “okay” to sin up a storm, and if we consistently go off toward the world, God will not hesitate to get our attention. But I am saying that even when God chastises us He does so out of love and our standing before Him remains constant even when our lifestyle does not.

 Let me offer another warning. Please do not try to take on the devil in your own strength. In my view the worst mistake we have made in the church is in teaching the notion that we can, in our own power and in our own wisdom, live the Christian life. Sunday after Sunday pulpits proclaim lists of good biblical commands and imperatives for us to do, but they are largely silent as to the power source needed to accomplish those things. Since almost nothing is specifically said about our total inability to do God’s will in our strength it is completely understandable and should be expected that the congregation will go out and “try” to obey the commands. We even have a phrase for those who are skeptical as to their ability to get the job done; we say, “just do your best and the Lord will do the rest.” Let’s consider that sincerely made and humanly logical statement. The scriptures teach that Christ lives in us and desires to live His life through us. Therefore from God’s perspective He sees only two types of actions that can come from us: (1) the life of His Son, or (2) the efforts of our flesh. Let me remind you what the Father said about Jesus: *“And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Mat. 3:17* So God can get your best or His Son’s best. Do we need to pursue the logic and value of your best any further? We teach young Christians that since Christ died for you the least you can do is live for Him. That statement has a great amount of logic in it, except for one thing: I don’t have what it takes to live for Him in myself. If we conclude that the bible is true then we must likewise conclude that Christ lives in us and can also live His life through us. Otherwise why would He tell us that without Him we can do nothing? Why would Paul write, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* What is the living water that is to flow out of our bellies if it isn’t the very life of Christ? What is the newness of life that we are to walk in if it isn’t the Spirit filled life? Why are we commanded to be filled with the Spirit if we can accomplish God’s will apart from God’s life lived out through us? The simple truth is that man was created to live a life with God and in dependence on God. Man fell because he believed the devil’s lie that man did not need to live in dependence on God. The gospel is the good news about man’s restoration to functionality by the life of God being placed in man in accordance with man’s original design. The gospel is not so much about getting man out of hell and into heaven as it is about getting God out of heaven and into man. Learning to live the Spirit filled life, the life where Christ actually lives through us, is a lifelong process of many failures and slow learning leading to a few but very important successes. Just learning this truth is not enough. There is moral imperative that faces us every day and thru out the day where we must choose against ourselves and yield ourselves completely to God. Please do not consider waging war against our adversary until your theology is rock solid and your practice is increasingly Spirit filled. But if we allow God, His power, and His wisdom to lead the way there is no way our adversary can avoid defeat; not only in the ultimate sense but even now in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.

 Let me close with this wonderful Old Testament story.

 “So he said, “Go and see where he *is,* that I may send and get him.” [The bad guys are coming for Elisha.] And it was told him, saying, “Surely *he is* in Dothan.”Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” [This is our cry today, as our hearts sink into fear and despair.] So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them.” And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

 Lord, open our eyes.

God bless you, stand and fight in the power of His might!

john