



Vestry Voices

The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational
Church of Clinton

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Spiritual Warfare

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12 (RSV)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



The first century worldview acknowledged a place for spirit beings: good and wicked spirits, god-like non-human beings, and among the descendants of Israel, the One True God who is Creator, Redeemer and King. Paul's statement to the church in Ephesus would be understood by all who heard or read it. There are wicked spirits who have control of many nations and human institutions. On a merely physical and human level it may seem that other humans are the only enemy to be fought. But, in truth, wicked spirits, led by *satan* (adversary and opponent of all that is of God and true), who is also the *devil* (the accuser), are influencing the human enemies. By the late sixteenth century, science and philosophy were beginning to downplay the existence of the spiritual world. In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the lead character's best friend is Horatio. When we read the play in high school, our teacher called him "Rickey Rational," a correct wordplay on his name. In a well-known line from Act 1, Scene 1, Hamlet addresses this criticism to his friend, who is convinced the ghost of Hamlet's father cannot exist: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Clearly, Shakespeare had a biblical worldview concerning spiritual beings. As new-age, demonic, belief is growing, in a world where there are so many polar opposites (sometimes in the same person!), there are a growing number of people who believe that "science" is the ultimate judge of all things. Both poles are dangerous. The rest of this article will address what God says about all this in His Word – the Bible.

We will start with what God told Moses in the last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy. According to the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Jesus' day): When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the an-

gels of God (Deuteronomy 32:8, LXX – Septuagint). Angels would be all spirit beings created by God. The nations other than Israel may have had wicked angels (devils) placed over them. This is brought out later in the same chapter: They sacrificed to devils, and not to God; to gods whom they knew not: new and fresh *gods* came in, whom their fathers knew not (verse 17 – LXX). In the Hebrew Bible, the word "shade" (demon) is used (RSV).

When Jesus was on earth, He cured people from unclean spirits. Luke, a highly educated physician, was led by the Holy Spirit to write: "And [Jesus] came down ... and stood on a level place, with ... a great multitude of people from all Judea ... and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed ... and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured" (Luke 6:17-19, RSV). Surely, Luke is a credible witness to the existence of unclean spirits and Jesus' mastery over them.

There are two truths contained earlier in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus that explain spiritual warfare as it affects people, and the help God gives to disciples of Jesus. First, by His resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Jesus demonstrated His total authority over all created beings, both spiritual and physical: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion ... not only in this age but also in that which is to come ... and has made him the head over all things for the church" (Ephesians 1:16-23, RSV).

The second truth brings out why the church is so important. Every disciple of Jesus Christ needs to be fully active in service to God in a local church. It is through the church that God puts unclean and wicked spirits, and their leader *satan*, on notice that they will lose in the end: "To me ... this grace was given ... to make all men see ... the mystery hidden

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Spiritual Warfare (... continued from page #1)

for ages ... that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:8-10, RSV). When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he warned them that disciples of Jesus must have nothing to do with demons: “what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20, RSV). It is essential that the church of Jesus remain consistent in its witness to all spirit beings that it worships only Jesus; and, it will sacrifice only to Him.

So far, we have looked at the earliest history of the nation of Israel and the current state of the universe in the church age. Now we will see what was revealed through the prophet Isaiah, and by Jesus himself, concerning the end of the age. First, Isaiah wrote: “All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall” (Isaiah 34:4, RSV). The host of heaven is all the spirit beings God created, both angels and demons. The host here is the demonic host. Jesus paraphrased Isaiah in His account to His disciples on the Mount of Olives of what will happen when He returns: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29, RSV).

So, spiritual warfare with *satan* and his demons will end when Jesus returns and puts an end to them. But, for now, all disciples of Jesus need to put on the full armor of God and stand together against *satan* and his demons. The first weapon is the belt of truth around the waist. Second, the heart and chest must be covered with God’s righteousness. Third, they must wear shoes to be prepared to speak to all they meet on the path about the Gospel of peace in Jesus. Fourth, they must take up a shield of faith to fend off burning arrows from the enemy. Fifth is the helmet of salvation; and sixth is the sword of the Spirit – the Word of God. Finally, the seventh

and last is the most important: they must always persevere in prayer with others who are being made holy in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:13-18). It is clear from this, that spiritual warfare is not an individual endeavor like golf or tennis; but, it always involves teamwork like baseball.

So, the church is in the “now and not yet” era between the two comings of Jesus Christ. We have all Scripture, including the Gospels and New Testament, so we know all God has done for us in Jesus Christ. But, the victory in Jesus over *satan* and his demons is not yet complete. Therefore, we must understand that the spiritual realm is real, and in some ways more powerful than the physical realm we encounter with our senses and brains. So, we must take up the seven powerful weapons God has given His Church, and work together in the persevering faith of Jesus. ~v~

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

Ephesians 6:13-18 (KJV)

Sundays in July

We will have Communion on July 6 and 20.

We will finish our series on Ruth and begin a new series on Job.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each of the Lord’s Day worship services in July:

Sunday	Readings	Theme / Title
July 6	Ruth 3:1-18; Matthew 7:7-8	Dare to act according to God’s will from His Word All who ask God, will receive from Him
July 13	Ruth 4:1-22; Luke 1:46-55	The kinsman-redeemer gives new life God is glorified for His salvation through Mary’s Son
July 20	Job 1:1-22; Psalm 40:1, 11-13	Yahweh can be praised, even after great losses When troubles surround, wait patiently for Yahweh
July 27	Job 3:1-10; 4:1-9; 7:11-21; Psalm 13:12-21	It is not a sin to question God out of great distress The universal question: how long must I have sorrow?



It Just Happens*... “As the World Turn, Covenant God”

by Petros

“It Just Happens*...” one of my favorite verses, that I talked about last month, is Joshua 24:15: “... choose for yourselves today whom you will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” “The Word” has become an OMG! for me. Not a casual Oh My God! as a text acronym, but the development of a relationship where I can interact with God and feel my obligations and failures to Him. My revelation is due in part to Pastor Gary’s preaching on Joshua and how he recounted how God had delivered His Chosen People – the Jewish Nation – to a land that God helped them to conquer. By the end of Joshua, we see the Nation of Israel wavering on their allegiance to God. After the Promised Land was secured, His Chosen People could not make an absolute decision to follow God. They were being complacent and placing other idols before God. Joshua was being led by God through many battles, the Holy Spirit leading, and shares from his heart that we can choose whom we will serve: “...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” We must learn from Joshua to choose to serve God – this day. Make a covenant with God and reaffirm each day to follow His Holy Spirit leading. God accepts us as we are, but we must choose to accept what He has prepared (good works) for us to do in His Kingdom.

I must interject – years ago, I was determined to read the entire Holy Bible. When I got to Joshua taking the promised land, it was difficult to embrace. I didn’t understand why God would enable “His” people to enter a foreign land and kill the inhabitants. Is history repeating itself with Israel at war with Hamas and Iran? In some sense, it is like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Or any of the “local” gang/terrorist movements repeatedly enforcing their rules and desires over the people of the land. Over the years, my God-given Faith led me to believe God is a Just God. He is the God who wants to be (my) our God. After all, He has given a self-centered, filthy rag like me life in the Kingdom of Heaven (on earth that Jesus brought with Him). However, God knew that the people of the land (in Joshua’s time) would never turn from their ways and be humble before Him. They would not be a good fit to dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven. By comparison, we see the people delivered into the land of milk and honey, led by Joshua following God closely. Once they conquered the land, they did not live in fear of God nor be dependent on Him. Despite being sure they would never forsake God, they began placing idols before God. I’m ashamed to admit that I can go days without thinking of God and His Grace upon me. Before Joshua dies, he sets the example of choosing to serve God.

I feel like God has put me on a path to answered prayers. Answered prayers before realizing the need to pray, because I have made a choice – a Covenant with God. I had been thinking of different ways to pray and align with God’s Will for the building of a Bluegrass Gospel Barn (aka “BGB”) and my part in it. At one point, I was ready to give up the dream; not seeing any progress, I thought it wasn’t God’s Will to be done. Then Joshua “... choose for yourselves today whom

you will serve ...” made me realize that when we make a choice to serve God, we enter a covenant with God. My NIV study bible by Zondervan said it best: “We are to fear and serve the Lord alone (24:14). This is based on a choice to obey him, instead of following other gods (24:15). We are incapable, however, of properly worshipping him because of our rebellion and sins (24:19). By choosing God as Lord, we enter into a covenant with him (24:25), whereby he promises not only to forgive and love us, but also to enable us by his Spirit to do His work here on earth. This covenant requires us to renounce the principles and practices of the culture around us that are hostile to God’s plan (24:23). This is not to be done alone, but by binding ourselves together with others who have faith in God.”

The building of the Bluegrass Gospel Barn has resumed after sitting the winter and most of the spring. There is green grass all around the ground. The first floor, measuring 36’x42’, of the BGB has been completed. The drawings have been revised to reflect the insulated, God-given windows. All the wood up to the second-floor walls has been delivered. Roof trusses have been ordered and are being custom built, to be ready once the walls are up. PTL!!!

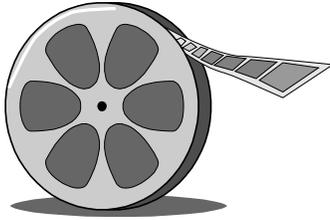
“It Just Happens*...” Pastor Gary caught my attention when he recently mentioned “Covenant God.” I had heard “Covenant God” many times before but never knew what it meant. Our God keeps on giving and we only begin to see all the blessings when we acknowledge Him as our God. “It Just Happens*...” his application (with Naomi) was, “when we are bitter before God because He does not give us what we want ... we must still seek Him ... (least we) forget the LOVE, faithfulness and sovereign goodness of our Covenant God.”

“It Just Happens*...” when I made my Covenant with God, I could forgive myself for placing other gods before Him and how selfish and unthankful I am before Him. All because, “he promises not only to forgive and love us, but also to enable by his Spirit to do His work here on earth ...”. Our God is an awesome God, and we can do better realizing what an awesome God He is. I will expand on this next month!

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor uselessly.” Psalm 127:1

Author’s note: This article’s title “It Just Happens*...” counters the cliché ... things just don’t happen. “It” will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. “Just” is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. “Happens” will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds. ~v~

Movie Night **Friday, July 25 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish.

So, please join us for a night out at the movies!





JULY 2025

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2 (††)	3 (**)	4 Independence Day	5
6 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	7	8	9 (††)	10 (**)	11	12
13 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #2)	14	15	16 (††)	17 (**)	18	19
20 Communion Sunday (Note #3)	21	22	23 (††)	24 (**)	25 Movie Night (Note #4)	26
27 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour (Note #5)	28 August "Vestry Voices" Articles Due (Note #6)	29	30 (††)	31 (**)		

Calendar Notes:

- #1) 7/6 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 7/13 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #3) 7/20 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #4) 7/25 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM**
- #5) 7/27 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour/Fellowship after Worship.
- #6) 7/28 — Articles are due for the August issue of "Vestry Voices" (for assembly/mail-out on July 29).
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **11:00 AM** (in FCC Parlor).
- (**) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

