

Series: Battlefield:  
fighting the flesh, the world, the devil  
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Colossians 2:15  
Spiritual warfare

This is an interview with Stephen Frye, an Atheist. He seems to imply that some of his struggle with the existence of God is the problem of suffering in the world. I imagine that you, whether a believer or not, have struggled with this question too.

The questions of what to think about;

1. Sickness, and death,
2. Natural evil and
3. Chaos in the world.

Where does cancer come from? Why is it even there?

Why did your close friend take their own life?

Why did an innocent child get sexually assaulted by a caregiver that they trusted?

Why did your parents split? Or even your marriage or relationship end despite doing everything right?

Why do floods and hurricanes kill people?

How dare God? And if this is Spiritual warfare which is the good side? Are we fighting for the wrong team?

***In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.***

***At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips, and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.***

Daniel 10:1

So Daniel has received some bad news about the war in a vision. Sounds like Spiritual warfare territory. I want us to notice that Daniel responds to this in certain ways. He

does not run or pretend nothing is happening. It is not business as usual. He does some form of fasting. Spiritual Disciplines or habits to position himself to hear from God.

***A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.***

***Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."***

So just unwrap that. Daniel prays, God answers and then what happens? Some Spirit, here called the Prince of Persia, intervenes to block God's response and it delays it a while. So God had intended and willed good. Then an evil spirit fought against God's will and even for a while seemed to be winning.

It seems that whatever these are they are separate from God, separate from humanity and they have agency and that means free will and the ability to enforce it. Much like you and I do. You have free will and a body to enforce it. And much like human beings these Spiritual beings can choose to be on God's side or against Him.

So it seems that such spirits exist. And if they can delay God's answer to Daniel, have they done this to you? Or what else can they do in the world?

Now it is easy to argue, those people of long ago just assumed there were evil spirits to help them explain things out of their control. We moderns know better. This is a fallacy. People 3000 years ago did not assume snakes talk and now we moderns have just discovered that they don't. They also knew they don't, yet we have a talking snake at the beginning of the story of the Bible, there must be more to what is going on here. So before we in pride do away with that worldview let us be open-minded and have intellectual humility.

And followers of Jesus, I need to remind you, this was the lens through which Jesus viewed the world.

One day Jesus was teaching and the Pharisees started arguing and debating with him. This drew a crowd. One because Jesus was growing in fame. But also the Pharisees were respected and fears and people were amazed at how different Jesus was to them and the authority with which he spoke.

On this particular day, there was a desperate father. His son had seizures from time to time since he was a boy. Probably epilepsy. A physical condition. He is sick. And like any parent, he tried everything to see him well even taking him to the disciples and it had not changed. So he took this opportunity and asked Jesus if he could do anything and if he had enough mercy to do something.

Mark 9:17-26

***A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."***

***So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.***

***Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"***

***"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."***

***"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."***

***Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"***

***When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."***

***The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.***

So was the boy sick or was he demonised? If you say they just did not know then how do we explain the fact that what Jesus does is perform an exorcism and the boy is freed from a physical ailment?

Jesus Did not cast out epilepsy or do a healing prayer. He cast out an evil spirit and then the epilepsy was healed. This was a situation of direct demonic oppression.

Another day Jesus is again teaching on the Sabbath and sees a crippled woman. Jesus is filled with compassion for her and decides to heal her. See how this encounter goes.

***and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.***

***Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."***

***The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"***

Luke 10:13-16

So here is a situation that Jesus does not cast out a demon instead just heals her of her infirmity. Yet in his response, he says that this was the work of the devil.

It seems to me that for Jesus the devil and evil spirits are real and they can inflict terror on human beings both directly like in the case of the boy and indirectly. Even when it is a physical ailment or a problem that can just be fixed by physical means or by addressing the problem itself Jesus sees the devil as the source of all suffering that is evil in the world.

Now, not all sickness is demonic. Not all suffering is demonic. I mean if you burnt your chapati's yesterday that is on you. If you forgot to put your taxes in on time and got fined that is on you. But significantly the source of all evil eventually is demonic.

Jesus work of teaching, loving the poor, healing the sick and bringing salvation is not different from casting out demons. His life, ministry, death and resurrection is how he destroys the work of the enemy.

From those two stories above I want you to realise that Jesus lives in this reality that there are Spiritual beings. They are separate from him and separate from human beings. And these worlds intersect. These Spiritual beings, like human beings, have

free will and the ability to enforce that will. And some choose to rebel and wage war against God.

And in their war against God, they can and often afflict human beings physically, mentally and emotionally.

But the thing is, they do not only afflict humanity, they also afflict and have an impact on creation itself.

***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.  
We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.***

Romans 8:18-22

We are suffering but have hope. But it is not just us that are caught up in Spiritual warfare and the frustration of it all. Even creation. The earth, the animal kingdom, the plants. Insects.

Why do mosquitoes act with such impunity? Why would a tiny virus just be so selfish caught up in self-replication and taken down the whole world for over 2 years? Why would a pig eat its kids? Why would the black widow spider after a great time turn on its benefactor and eat him? Don't even get me started on hurricanes, floods and drought in this country.

All of creation is just as frustrated by evil that it has been subjected to as we are.

The other piece is human action. I can in my own heart because of my brokenness participate in evil. And this will cause suffering to people and depending on who is connected to me that could be many people.

For example, when a driver decides to drive drunk and is involved in an accident that takes away life, what do we say about that? If the person that dies is the breadwinner of a family that then goes on to be kicked out of their house? Is this demonic? Indirectly yes. But sometimes what we see around is the impact of broken people participating in evil. But certainly, never God's will.

It breaks my heart when people or even myself attribute the work of the enemy to God. How many bad things do you see happening and people call it God's will. You go to funerals and all the documents read, "We love you but God loved you more" as if God is in the business of killing especially those he loves.

Or when people go through something so bad and it works out for good and they assume that the evil must have been God's idea or doing, to begin with.

***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

John 10:10

The enemy's number one job is to destroy it all. When you see destruction and death and chaos. And Jesus comes to destroy the work of the enemy. Jesus comes to bring life not death.

You see we are at war and on the other side can be people who chose to participate in evil, there can be Spiritual beings that decide to participate in evil and at the head of it all is the devil, satan, the thief. The serpent of old. Jesus also calls him the Prince of this world. In those days, a prince was not only sitting in palaces they were also to lead their nations to war at the very head of the army and on the battlefield.

We are headed towards Easter. This was the moment of Victory, Christus Victor. At the cross, Jesus won the whole war. It is finished.

***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***

Col 2:15

So why then are we still in warfare and why does it feel just as hard. Sometimes an enemy fights harder when they have lost the battle.

On June 6 1944, the Allied armies landed on the beaches of Normandy and began a battle that was decisive against Nazi Germany in World War 2. From this day both sides knew that Germany had lost the war. However, fighting continued. It went on for another year even though Germany had lost. And in the battles that went on, there was still destruction and death. It was not until May 8, 1945, that Germany gave its unconditional surrender. Effectively ending World War 2 in Europe.

This is essentially where we are. Jesus won the victory at the cross and his resurrection against the enemy and evil. But the enemy still keeps fighting. But he has

lost. And at the return of Jesus, the enemy will be completely defeated and cast away.

So stand firm not as one who may lose but as one who has been assured of victory. But stand nonetheless, because the battles are still raging. So, what do we do in the meantime?

1. We wait with expectation. Like a bride waiting for her groom. We say even so come. We keep watch and we pray
2. Spiritual discipline is Spiritual warfare. Fasting, praying, scripture, going to church in such gatherings and smaller ones around homes,
3. We pray for the sick and we cast out demons in the name of Jesus.
4. We feed the hungry and clothe the naked and house the homeless
5. We love the widow and the widower as full members of the family
6. We adopt the homeless
7. We preach the goodness of the Kingdom of God, that our God is coming, Our God is here
8. We follow Jesus and invite others to follow him, disciples who make disciples.

For all those called by the father's name. Here today God's word, Fear not, for I have conquered the world.

For death could not hold him  
He has no rival, he has no equal

Let's Pray