

Divine Romance - Spiritual Warfare

Message 1

Eph. 5:25-27; 6:10-12; Rev. 19:7-8, 14; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; 10:3-5; 2 Tim. 1:7

Saints, it surely is a joy to be with you all. This weekend we are going to cover a topic that is quite broad. I want to give you key words that will guide our fellowship for the four meetings that we will have in this conference. The topic is really two parts. Some of you may understand how they go together but new ones among us will wonder how these two phrases go together. Actually, these two topics are put together in the Bible quite a number of times. We read some of the key verses already.

The first topic is the divine romance; the other one is spiritual warfare. From a certain angle you can say that the whole Bible is just about these two topics. The Bible begins with a couple. That fact shows us something; it shows what is in the heart of God. This is a great gospel. We should tell people, “Do you know what the Bible is about? It is about a romance.” I don’t think that many people have this concept. I don’t know if they practice this here in Canada; do your hotels have Bibles in the rooms. You used to—oh, that’s too bad. That’s not a good sign. Even in America we still have Bibles in our hotel rooms. You find a Bible in nearly every room of every hotel that you go to. Except these days in certain chains you find the Bible plus one or two other books. When I find them I always stack them and put the Bible on top. Actually, people would like to know what the Bible is about. It is really a mystery. Many would say, “I read a little but I didn’t understand.” We can tell them that the Bible is a romance. It begins with a couple and it ends with a couple.

From another angle you can say that the whole Bible is about a war, a battle between two parties. This warfare is because of the romance. This warfare is attempting to counter that romance. We want to see that this is our experience every day. My main burden this evening is to show you how this is our experience, not only every day, but as soon as wake up. Every morning we awaken to one of these topics or both.

God’s central work that He wants to do (you could say that it is the only thing He wants to do) is to dispense Himself into us, His chosen and redeemed people. He wants to dispense Himself into each one of us personally. Out of this dispensing He desires that something would be produced, a corporate entity that expresses and represents God and consummates in the New Jerusalem. That is actually what God is doing today. Regardless of what we are doing, regardless if we are at work, at home with children, on an aeroplane, or in a car going somewhere, God is doing His dispensing. We also trust and pray that He is doing this right now in this meeting in a more intensified way. Until our head hits the pillow tonight and maybe even after that, God wants to continue that work. He wants to dispense Himself into us.

That dispensing work that God wants to do is not something objective or cold. It is not just that there is a God with a purpose so He created these creatures with whom He wants to carry out His purpose with the creatures He created. It is not so cold. Actually, He wants to carry this out through an intimate, personal and tailor made dispensing. His dispensing is measured to each of us. As our high priest He understands and is interceding behind the scenes that we would receive a certain supply and certain aspects of Him that we never experienced before. As this is going on we fall in love with Him; we love Him.

I still remember the night that this dispensing began in me. I was just a seven year old little boy in Brooklyn, New York on Friday July 13th. This little boy received God's dispensing for the first time. My older sister was almost 17 and was preparing a Sunday school lesson. We grew up in the Brethren denomination and my sister loved the Lord very much and started serving the Lord as a young teenager. She was teaching a group of 8 year old girls and was preparing her lesson Friday evening. I happened to be in the same room because we lived in a small apartment where the dining room and living room area were in the same room. As she was preparing on the dining room table I was watching my favourite TV show in the living room area. At 8:15 when there was a commercial break I went to the kitchen to get something to eat. As I passed by I saw that my sister was preparing something. I asked her, "What are you doing?" She had some cutouts for a flannel graph. It had little pictures. The kids today don't know what that is; today they would only know PowerPoint. That interested me and then she told me a story about a man who had 100 sheep. You know this story, but remember that I was 7 years old. Then he lost one of the sheep! She had a picture of a flock of sheep and another of a man who she said was a shepherd because he was holding a stick. Then there was one sheep that was away from the rest. She moved the man over saying he found the sheep. Then she took off that picture of the shepherd and put on another one with the sheep on the man's shoulders. She asked me, "Do you know who the lost sheep is?" I said, "No." She said, "It is you." I said, "Really?" Then she said, "You know the picture of the man holding the sheep? That's what Jesus was doing on the cross. He was holding all the sheep, bringing them home." I think that at that instant, even before I prayed a few minutes later, I got saved because the love of the Lord just flooded this little boy. At that moment I knew the love of God. Then she took all the pictures off the flannel graph and replaced them with a heart with a door. When you opened the door there was a little man inside. Then she used a verse from Revelation chapter 3 which says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens the door I will come into him and feast with him and he with Me." Then she asked me, "Would you like to open your heart to the Lord?" I said, "Yes." We went to her room and knelt down and this little boy got saved. That was my first experience of dispensing. It surely was a sweet dispensing. Even though it was so many years ago I remember those details like it was last night. It was more than 50 years ago. The dispensing was so sweet.

I think that all of us have had experiences of the sweet dispensing that is so personal, so intimate, so affectionate, and so spiritual. That is how the Lord accomplishes His dispensing, but the enemy will always come to attempt to interrupt the dispensing. So the Bible puts these two matters together a number of times. We read Ephesians chapter 5, verses 25-27, and then we read chapter 6, verses 10-12. What do you see in Ephesians 5? The bride. What do you see in Ephesians 6? The corporate warrior of God. No book unveils the church the way Ephesians does. Ephesians shows us at least 12 different aspects of the church but these are the final two—the bride and the warrior. Actually it is through the bride that the Lord gets His expression.

This we see in the book of the Song of Songs. In the Song of Songs the lover is transformed to be the same as the Beloved, the female version of Solomon. She is called the Shulamite, the feminine version of Solomon. At the end of the Bible you see the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; that is the church at its consummation. So the bride is really for expression. Now we come to the warrior; the warrior is to fulfill the other intention in Genesis 1:26. The bride is to express God; the warrior is to exercise His dominion. Actually, these two aspects of the bride and the warrior fulfill Genesis 1:26.

This is not the only place where we can see this; we also see it in Revelation 19, verses 7-8 and 14. In verses 7 and 8 it says that the marriage of the Lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready. She is adorned in fine linen, bright and clean. Then just a few verses later in verse 14, the scene changes and the Lord is coming to fight the Antichrist. He comes with his armies who are dressed in fine linen, bright and pure. In other words, they are dressed in their wedding dresses. Here the Bible puts together the ultimate marriage with the warrior. When the Lord comes back we also have the romance and the warrior just as Ephesians puts together the bride and the warrior.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 3 and in chapter 10 verse 5, the Bible also puts the romance and the warfare together. Chapter 11, verses 2 and 3 say, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." Here the Bible clearly shows us through Paul's speaking that we were betrothed. When we were saved we got betrothed to our Beloved. The apostle is saying, "I am jealous over you because in those early days you loved the Lord purely." But then he says, "I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts would be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ."

Now we come to my real burden: This warfare is very subjective and daily for each one of us. This warfare is now taking place within our being. Did you experience this today? Were your thoughts corrupted from the simplicity and the purity toward Christ? When the enemy, the serpent, Satan came to Eve, he came with a suggestion; he came with a question: "Did God really say...?" and she had some conversation with the serpent. Then he said, "God knows that in the day that you eat this you will become like God." The implication is that God is keeping something good from you; God is not telling you the whole story. Satan was actually accusing God. Very often Satan comes to accuse us: "You did this, you are so bad." But did you know that Satan first came to accuse God? He accused God to man saying that God's heart is not altogether good towards you. Even up to today he tries the same tactic. Sometimes if we are not on guard we begin to think, "Does the Lord really love me? If He is faithful, why has this prayer not been answered?" Satan comes with his suggestions. One little thought can come as a seed that grows to bankrupt our spiritual life. Satan tries to suggest his thoughts into our thoughts. This is his strategy.

Second Corinthians chapter 10, verse 3 says, "For though we walk in flesh, we do not war according to flesh." The next chapter is talking about being betrothed to the Lord, but this chapter is talking about warfare. Verses 4 and 5 say, "For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful before God for the overthrowing of strongholds, as we overthrow reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ." Here the Bible is exposing Satan's strategy. He comes to attack us in our thoughts. I would recommend that you would do a study of the word *thoughts* in 2nd Corinthians. Chapter 2, verse 11 says, "That we may not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." Do you know that the root of the word *schemes* is the word *thoughts* or *mind*? You could translate this as "We are not ignorant of his mind or of his thoughts." Whose thoughts? Satan's thoughts.

Ephesians 6:16 talks about the flaming darts of the evil one. The word *flaming darts* is not talking about the kind of darts that we know today. It is not talking about a little board where you throw this little thing to try to get into the middle of the dartboard; that is not what the Bible is talking about. The flaming darts there are what was used in the ancient times where the major defence for a city was a wall. When an army was attacking they would take arrows and wrap the tip

of the arrow in some cloth, dip it in oil, and light it so that it was on fire. Then they would shoot the arrow over the wall. It didn't have to be precise. It was not like the smart bombs today where you can see them go right into the target. This is just shooting it over the wall and if you shoot enough of them over the wall, something is going to catch fire. That is how the enemy works. Has this happened to you this morning? You come to the Lord to spend some time with Him. Then a thought comes: "Oh, I forgot to call brother Ron. What time is it? Should I call him, should I text him?" Maybe right there you do text him. Then you remember: "Oh, I need to come back to the Bible. Amen. In the beginning was the Word. Amen." Then another thought comes: "Oh, do I have a dental appointment, or is that tomorrow?" Did you ever spend part of your morning time with the Lord in this kind of realm? Then as soon as you come back another dart comes. Today it was difficult for me because I was travelling. I tried to spend time with the Lord and then: "Oh, do I have my passport? Yes, okay." "Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus." "Oh, did I take care of this?" It is very possible that when you try to spend 15 minutes with the Lord, 13 minutes are occupied by the darts.

What are we doing? We are trying to develop our romance with the Lord. We can spend time with the Lord any time but it is especially an honor to the Lord to set apart some time first thing in the morning before we get involved in the affairs of human life, before we even touch anything of service. We should just be with the Lord. But when we set apart this time with the Lord, whether it is 10 minutes, 15 minutes or 30 minutes, we don't want to be distracted, but thoughts come. We should realize that these are not our thoughts; they are Satan's thoughts. These thoughts are his devices his, his thoughts. We never have to repent of these thoughts. When a thought comes it is not our thought; it is Satan's thought. Just because it's not evil doesn't mean that it is not Satan's thought. Sometimes you may have a very pleasant thought. Actually, it's hard to believe, but I have three grandchildren. A couple of weeks ago I was going to see them on the way to a conference. So that morning (I think any parent or grandparent would be able to sympathize) when I was praying a thought of my newborn grandson came in: "I miss him, I can't wait to see him." Do you know that at that moment even the thought of my adorable grandson was Satan's thought not mine. I don't want to think about him now; I can think about him later.

Saints, we don't have to waste time to repent saying, "Oh Lord, forgive me; oh Lord I come back." Just return and keep developing your romance. Remember, the enemy will always come to try to interrupt the sweet dispensing. I hope that in this little fellowship you would realize that there is a spiritual warfare around us behind the scenes all the time. We are not insignificant persons; we actually mean something to the Lord and to Satan. It means something, especially now at the end of the age. The church will be the factor to turn this age; so saints, our time with the Lord is very meaningful. We should not let it be disturbed so easily; we need to have a realization that there is a spiritual scenery.

The Book of Daniel gives a very good illustration of this. In chapter 10 Daniel is praying. He prayed for 21 days, three whole weeks. Then the angel comes and tells him, "Your prayer was heard 3 weeks ago but I am only coming now because along the way there was a battle. A warfare was going on that prevented me from coming. How significant the prayer of one man on the Earth was that it would stir up the evil forces to try to delay the answer to this prayer! Man in cooperation with God is not insignificant. Our prayers mean something, not just when we are praying for things such as the Lord's work and the Lord's move on the Earth. Even our prayer just to receive and enjoy the dispensing means something. That little story in Daniel 10 shows us that the enemy will fight against our fellowship with God. It is not insignificant.

Second Kings chapter 6, starting from verse 15 says, “And the servant of the man of God rose early and went out, and there it was: an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. And his attendant said to him, Alas, my master! What shall we do?” He woke up early and saw the enemy. Actually, this matches our experience; we also wake up early and see the enemy. Elisha said, “Do not fear, for they who are with us are more than they who are with them. And Elisha prayed and said, O Jehovah, open his eyes that he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the attendant, and he saw: The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” Elishah realized that there was a spiritual scene that the attendant could not see; since the attendant could not see, his faith was weak. “What shall we do?” How did Elisha fight this battle? He prayed, “Lord, open his eyes.” I hope that through this word tonight and this weekend the Lord could open our eyes to see that those who are with us are more than those who are with them. The Lord is with us in this battle! May we have a view of the spiritual warfare going on. This would stir us to exercise our faith.

I hope that in this weekend we will come to the matter of the shield of faith and we will see there that faith has a lot to do with our will. We need to exercise our will in a proper way. This does not mean that we have to fight to be strong. We read Ephesians 6:10 which says, “Finally, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of his strength.” Please note that it does not say, “Be powerful.” If it would say, “Be powerful”, I would say, “Lord, this sounds good but I don’t think I can do it.” But it does not say, “Be powerful”; it says, “Be empowered.” In other words, allow the Lord to dispense His strength, even to dispense Himself as our power and our strength. That needs our cooperation, the proper exercise of our will.

When man fell, our entire being was affected by the fall. The enemy injected himself into our body making it the flesh, and our soul became the self. That is why we need to deny our self. We do need to deny our self! And our spirit was deadened. However, even though our spirit was deadened, a function of our spirit was preserved, and that is our conscience. If man’s conscience was never preserved, how could man be saved? When the Spirit of reality comes, He will convict the world concerning sin. The Spirit’s conviction is effective because even in the fall God preserved man’s conscience. But not only so, even though our entire soul was corrupted and defiled by the fall, God still preserved our free will. There are many things in our mind, even things that we don’t want to be there, such as thoughts of revenge, evil thoughts, and jealousy. Our emotion is drawn to things that we don’t want to be drawn to, but we can’t help it. But God has preserved our will! If God did not preserve our will, how could man choose God? How could man be saved? Paul said that he was the foremost of sinners; but even so, he could respond to the Lord. Our will plays a key role in the spiritual warfare; we need to exercise our will. When it says, “be empowered” the word *be* is passive, but *empowered* is active. We need to be active to receive the dispensing.

Let’s come back to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. We encourage all the saints to have a set time with the Lord and we believe that most of the saints practice this every day. When a new one receives the Lord, we always encourage them to have a set time with the Lord. Of course, there are different aspects of prayer. We should have the kind of fellowship with the Lord that is continuous; wherever we are, we should tell the Lord everything. We should just talk to Him. We should have hundreds of conversations with the Lord every day, even to say, “Lord thank You that the sky is blue. Lord, thank You for this new day. Thank You that I did not miss the bus. Thank You that I got a parking spot.” Just talk to the Lord about everything. But on the other hand, we should set apart time to be with the Lord, to have fellowship with God.

It is particularly good to set apart some time in the morning, not for prayer for things, but prayer for fellowship. We may have burdens in our hearts such as some unbelievers that we desire to be saved, family members who are sick, or members of the church whom we want to shepherd. Of course, we should pray for them, but not during the time of fellowship with the Lord. We should set apart another time, or if we have a longer time with the Lord, we can come to these things at the end. But it is important that we set apart times with Lord for fellowship, just for fellowship. That fellowship includes using the Word, to pray with the Word, with a verse. All the brothers and sisters should try to do this, even try to do this every day,

My burden is concerning the quality of our time with the Lord. If you are setting apart 10 minutes, how many minutes of those 10 minutes are really effective, and how many minutes are under the attack of the thoughts? My burden is from my study; I have been actively studying this matter of having fellowship with the Lord for about 31 years. I have been studying not only in my own experience, but also with saints of different ages, in different places, and in different continents. I found out that the number one frustration to our fellowship with the Lord is the undisciplined mind. Stray thoughts. Nearly everyone struggles with this when they try to spend time with the Lord.

When I was younger I used to think that I was the only one who had such a problem. I found out later that nearly everyone has the problem of stray thoughts even now. It could be a dream that you had last night. Did this ever happen to you? You are praying, "Lord, I love You" and you don't even realize when another thought comes, but you find yourself thinking of the dream that you had last night. If the dream was not a good one, you find your inner being sinking. It may take you 3 or 4 minutes that you are thinking about that to realize that you are thinking about your dream. You may not know when it started but suddenly you have a realization, "I need to come back." Sometimes it is like trying to pull yourself out of quicksand. How can we take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ as it says in 2 Corinthians 10:5? This takes a combination of our spirit and our will. First, we need the enlightenment of the Word in these verses that we read tonight that really expose Satan's strategy.

Second Timothy 1:7 is another key verse. It says, "For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness." Please notice that it is our spirit, but this verse says it is a spirit of three things. What are those three things? Power, love and sobermindedness. Isn't it something that our spirit has the three parts of our soul covered? Of course, the sobermindedness matches the mind, love matches the emotion, and power matches the will. This is not about exercising our will power; this is our exercising our spirit which is a spirit of power that empowers our will to stand with the Lord in the spiritual warfare. This is our will and our spirit rising up to say, "No!" You cannot keep a thought from coming but you can stop the thought from interrupting the dispensing. Sometimes, when the spirit is more sensitive as I am there with the Lord and a thought comes, I would even say "No" out loud, "Stop." You tell your mind stop and then you continue. Saints, we need to rule our inner being by our spirit of power.

This warfare is not just in the future when the Lord comes back; this warfare is not just in the church in general. It is there, but not only there. This warfare is in our being. Our focus, our attention should not be on the warfare; our focus should be on the romance. But when the enemy comes, we need to be empowered so that we can stop the enemy's attack that is coming to interrupt the dispensing of the Lord into our being. So saints, be empowered in the Lord in your personal fellowship with the Lord. In the next message we want to have more fellowship on developing the

romance and how to exercise in taking captive every thought. My real burden is the quality of our time with the Lord. I know that many saints are faithful to spend time, but the enemy is relentless.

In Matthew 16 we have what is possibly the greatest prophecy in the Bible: “I will build My church”. There is no period after that declaration but a comma, because right away the Lord unveiled something else: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” On the one hand, you can take this, and we should, as a promise. The gates of Hades shall not prevail. Has it not seemed sometimes that the gates of Hades were prevailing? I think that all of us would sometimes when we look back say, “Oh oh, the gates of Hades were prevailing.” But we can take the promise: “I don’t live by what I see; I don’t believe the appearance. I live by faith; I live by the Word. The Word says that the gates of Hades shall not prevail.” On the other hand, this is a kind of warning that whenever the Lord is building the church, the gates of Hades are right there. The gates of Hades will always try to prevail. Where does the Lord build His church? How does the Lord build His church? There are some aspects of His building in the meetings of the church and in the church life, but when you are meeting with the Lord in the morning, the Lord is making His home in your heart. The Lord wants to build Himself into you more. Do not think that the gates of Hades will not be there. How do they try to prevail? Mostly in your thoughts. We want to expose the enemy and open our eyes to see the spiritual warfare around us. Still, I want to emphasize again, “Don’t focus on the warfare; focus on the romance.” “Amen, Lord Jesus we love You.”