

## *Recon*

### *2 Corinthians 2:11*

There's a famous April Fools tale from the Oxford University rugby team. Now, the reason April Fools works is because the person who is the butt of the joke is somewhat ignorant. In this case, the ignorance had to do with some Australian members of the rugby team who didn't understand whether England, Wales, and Scotland were different countries or not. Understandably so. It's complicated. I can barely explain it. But I'll try... In international law, they are all viewed as one sovereign state—The United Kingdom—and not separate states. And that means, when you travel between them, you don't need any form of ID. Sadly, not everyone knows this.

And this group of ignorant Australian rugby players didn't understand this. For one game, the Oxford University team headed to Cardiff in Wales. Just as they were nearing the toll bridge between England and Wales some of the English members of the team, ready to play the prank, turned to their Australian teammates and said: "You guys did remember to bring your passports, right?" Suddenly, the Aussies panicked... "You didn't tell us we needed our passports!" The Englishmen said, "Well... there's only one thing for it." They got the driver to pull over the bus just shy of the toll booths, told the Aussies to get out, and they opened up the underneath of the bus where all the bags were stored and told them to get in. The driver pulled off as the bus roared with laughter at the thought of these Aussies traveling 70mph underneath the bus with all the team uniforms and bags. To be ignorant is to be outwitted.

We've been preaching this series on Spiritual Warfare so that you would have the knowledge and tools you need to recognize and fight the spiritual battle that we find ourselves in on a day to day basis. We believe the Bible tells us we have a real spiritual enemy—Satan or the Devil, but that Christ has won the decisive victory over him on the cross. Even though the war is over, the battle is still raging, and Christ has empowered his followers with his authority in this battle to face the enemy.

Paul, the author of over half the New Testament, recognized the importance of understanding this battle. Last week we heard Pastor Larry speak about the spiritual armor Paul told us to put on. Another place where Paul writes about this battle is in his letter to the church in Corinth. When speaking about why he was choosing to forgive some people for what they did, he wrote this: "*so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs*" (2 Corinthians 2:11). According to Paul, to be ignorant is to be outwitted. To be ignorant of Satan's schemes or designs is to be outwitted by him. Just like those ignorant Australian rugby players were outwitted by the schemes of their English counterparts, Paul says that if we are ignorant of Satan's schemes we will be outwitted by him.

So what can we do to remove our ignorance? Recon. We can do reconnaissance work to discover the schemes or designs of Satan, and remove our ignorance, so that he would not outwit us. Recon can be frightening at times, so as we do recon, we must remember that Jesus has won the war, empowered us with his authority and goes with us by His Spirit. Therefore, we need not fear. The God of Angel Armies is by our side.

And there are two things I believe we need to recon. The first is recognizing what degree of influence Satan can have over believers. And the second is, knowing what are the schemes of Satan. In order to do this, I want to introduce an image to you.

I want you to think of your life like my house. Well, technically, it's not my house. I'm renting it from my landlords. I don't own my house, my landlords do. But I do inhabit it and have a great degree of influence over it. And more than that, I can choose to invite people into my home with me. In fact, my kids live in my house, and let me tell you that after we let them run riot for even 20 minutes, the place is a complete mess! In the same way, I believe Scripture says, our lives are like this house. Our lives as believers are owned by God, but we can invite Satan into our lives and he can run riot. We can open the door, so to speak, and give him a place or a foothold from which he, or one of his demons, can exert their influence.

Now, how do I see this in scripture? Well, there are several passages in the New Testament that assert that Satan can have a degree of influence over a believer. An important one is in Ephesians chapter 4, where Paul writes: *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:26–27). Paul here says that anger is not the problem, rather sin is. And sin gives the devil an opportunity. The word translated opportunity here is *topos* which is a pictorial word describing a climbing term: "foothold." Paul is saying that when we sin, we provide Satan with a foothold in our lives.

But *topos* is also used throughout the New Testament to refer to an inhabitable location, or a "place." Jesus even uses it this way with reference to evil spirits. He says: *"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none"* (Matthew 12:43). Paul is claiming in Ephesians 4 that when believers sin, they give a place for Satan in their lives. In other words, when believers sin, they open the door of their house and give Satan the opportunity to walk in and wreak havoc.

Let me be clear on one thing though. Satan can never own a believer. When you profess faith in Jesus Christ you are *"delivered ... from the domain of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of his beloved Son"* (Colossians 1:13). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, *"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price"* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). As followers of Jesus, we belong to God. Believers in Jesus Christ cannot be owned by the devil or a demon. Just like my house is owned by my landlord, your life, if you follow Jesus, is owned by God. However, you can still open up that door and give the devil a place, like I can let people into my home.

So what doors can we open in life that give the devil a foothold, or a place? What are Satan's schemes? I want to touch upon two areas that I see in Scripture. I don't believe this is an exhaustive list, but they are two prominent schemes of the devil. The first we have already

looked at... sin. As the verse we've already been looking at says, *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:26–27). Paul tells us to be angry, so anger is not the problem, rather it is what so often results from anger: sin. When we sin, we give Satan a foothold in our lives that he will use to his advantage. But does that mean that any time we sin, the devil will come in and use it? Not necessarily. Giving him a foothold, or, opening a door, does not force Satan to use it to his advantage, but he can.

Sin is a reality of our lives, but for many of us, certain sins can become habitual. Viewing pornography, angry outbursts, substance use, self-harming, and many other things can become habits. And the more habitual something is, I believe the bigger the foothold we give Satan. For many, an accountability partner or team, or recovery ministry, or counseling, or prayer can break these habits. But for some, this doesn't work. In situations like that, I have to question whether the foothold they have given the devil is so big, and the influence he is exerting over their life so strong, that without someone taking the authority of Jesus and using it to command Satan and his demons to flee, they may never be free from these habits. I don't believe Scripture gives us a hard and fast rule about when deliverance is needed, but it does tell us that when we sin, we give the devil a foothold. And the more we sin, the bigger that foothold will become.

The second scheme of the devil I want us to consider this morning is found not in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, but in Paul's ministry to the Ephesians as recorded in Acts 19. Paul was in Ephesus for 2 years and in that time he ministered to a city that appeared to be full of people who practiced "magic arts." At one point, some itinerant Jewish exorcists decided to try cast out an evil spirit without the authority of Jesus, and they were overpowered and ran away naked. This caused a great deal of fear to fall upon all the residents of Ephesus. Then, Acts 19 says this: *"many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver"* (Acts 19:18–19).

Notice that those who were coming and confessing their practices were believers. And I believe here, we see the other main scheme that Satan will use to influence believers: the magic arts or the occult. These believers had been participating in the occult, and upon hearing of the power of the spirits that had taken up residence in someone else, they immediately knew that they needed to stop and confess their own practices. Their practices had given Satan the ability to exert influence over them and they did not want it to continue. Moreover, not only did they divulge their practices but they also took their books and burned them, with the total value coming to \$6 million dollars today!

What are these magic arts? Well the Old Testament gives us a much more comprehensive description; for example, Deuteronomy 18 gives us this list: *"anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead"* (Deuteronomy 18:10–11). Based upon this list we should understand the following modern practices as magic arts: witchcraft or wicca, palm or tarot reading, the taking of certain vows or oaths to the devil or spirits, divination through horoscopes, and to the calling up of spirits, which is what a ouija board is aiming to do.

This story of occult is more personal for me. A member of my family in England trained to be a medium. After a time she left her practices behind, but then she began to be afflicted. She would have out of body experiences at night, visitations from evil spirits, and at times would wake up feeling like she was being strangled. Eventually, she couldn't sleep and it all became too much. One day, she heard a voice tell her: "burn the books." So she did. She took all her occult material outside and had a bonfire. And there was some relief... for a time.

Then it continued. She reached out to a minister who performed an exorcism, but he never asked her if she believed in Jesus. And again, although there was temporary relief, the afflictions continued. Ultimately, she began attending a young moms Bible study at her local rowing club and become a believer. However, when she shared her afflictions with fellow believers she was shunned as someone who was crazy.

It took one elder in the church to take her aside and with his wife begin ministering to her and setting her free from the evil spirits she had given access to in her life. She was already saved, but those doors that she had opened through her occult practices took time to close down; this was not a once and done deal. She had to confess and divulge those practices, just like the believers in Acts 19. But, ultimately, the power of the name of Jesus triumphed and she was set free of her affliction.

Church, the reality is that even in our western, highly educated society, Satan is at work. Through his schemes of sin, and the occult, Satan is able to gain influence over the lives of believers and afflict us. However, there is power in the name of Jesus. He has defeated Satan and those who follow him have been bought by his blood and are now owned by God alone. As a result we have freedom in the name of Jesus. Nevertheless, the freedom Jesus has won for us is not realized if we are going to go and open up one of those doors again, whether it be a habitual sin, or an occultic practice or object. Acts 19 tells us that the "believers came, confessing and divulging their practices." (Acts 19:18). Any deliverance of a believer is only effective if we confess and divulge our practices.

This weekend we are going to take communion together. 1 Corinthians tells us that, "*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons*" (1 Corinthians 10:21). If you are here this weekend and you are engaged in habitual sin, or have a history occult practices that you haven't confessed before, I want to suggest that you take some time to confess that to the Lord before taking communion. Further, if you wish to receive prayer alongside communion, we will have our prayer team available in the back and after the service. And, beginning next Sunday, we will be hosting healing services at 10am in the prayer chapel. These will continue on the second Sunday of every month.

Jesus has won the victory. You have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. Now is the time to claim that freedom. To repent of your past and live into the freedom of Christ. This act of communion is a sign of our belonging to God; our oneness with Christ. Live into your freedom in Christ this weekend.