

# Why We Should Expect Supernatural Opposition

TREVIN WAX

Do we really believe in demons? Do we believe there are powers and principalities arrayed against the church? I posed this question to many Churches and looked at the New Testament's teaching on spiritual warfare.

Today, I want to point out an example from one of Paul's letters. This comment from Paul stands out to me because of how unremarkable it seems to him.

So, we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For whom is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy!" (1 Thess. 2:18-20)

This comment stands out to me because Paul takes Satan's opposition (hindrance, in this case) to be ordinary, not extraordinary. By moving right along without explanation, it's clear Paul assumed the Thessalonian readers would have seen Satan's hindrance in much the same way.

## Expecting Opposition

When we examine the New Testament closely, we see this type of language on occasion. It should thus make us wonder if perhaps we are the ones who have assumed supernatural opposition only occurs in extreme circumstances. It's clear the apostle Paul believed that an evil presence exists, a personal force outside the norms of human experience. Paul believed in malevolent beings at work in the world, hindering the advancement of the gospel: Satan and his minions.

I worry that, in order to maintain a level of cultural respectability or to avoid certain excesses, we are inclined to downplay this kind of talk.

One way conservative Christians might downplay the role of the evil one in the world is by saying that whatever happens is, in the end, God's will—to jump back to God as the One putting up the roadblocks here, since apparently God allowed Satan to hinder Paul. And while, yes, it is true that God is ultimately sovereign, and that nothing can happen to us that is not permitted by God (see the book of Job!), Paul in this case had the spiritual sensibility to discern and the boldness to declare when he sensed the evil one being responsible for a hindrance.

Paul held together the sovereignty of God and the real and personal agency of Satan. He didn't downplay either one of those essential truths. Neither should we. To be clear, Paul did not adopt a dualist approach that would make Satan out to be God's opposite. But neither did he shift from discussing the significance of Satan's work by delving into theological reflection on God's sovereignty that might mitigate or suppress the startling fact—that Satan hindered them.

## Expecting Resistance

As Christians, we should expect supernatural opposition. We should expect that when God seizes our affections, when the Lord starts a fire in our hearts, when the Spirit mortifies sin in our lives—our bondage

to pornography or alcohol or whatever sin may be holding us back—when God is at work, supernatural opposition will increase, trying to resist the growth of the kingdom.

You know you're on the right path, not when everything is smooth and easy, but when it seems like there is a battle raging around you and the road is tough! Why would the evil one bother Christians who aren't a threat to his domain? If you are a believer who is passionate for Jesus and all about his mission, you should expect resistance.

## **Expecting Joy**

So, what do we do when we're facing Satan's opposition? What keeps us going when facing resistance? From Paul's example, we see the first answer is joy.

Paul talks about the Thessalonians with great joy. His joy flows from their faithfulness. When he sees the transformation of that church due to the gospel, he is overjoyed despite the roadblocks. The supernatural opposition is tough, but there's something there to match it: joy in Jesus and his people. That joy gives Paul the strength to continue on.

Paul says of the Thessalonians, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy!"

Can we say that about our own church? It's so easy to see mistakes among God's people. But are we more in tune with the faults of God's people or the beauty of the Bride of Christ? Do we look for evidences of imperfection, or do we look for evidences of grace?

Paul says this church is his hope, his joy, his crown, and his glory! It's easy to focus on the challenges we face, or the supernatural resistance we feel. One response is to look at God's people and take joy in others.

## **Expecting Hope**

A second factor in helping us face Satan's opposition is hope in Jesus's return. Paul talks about the Lord Jesus coming back. He knows for certain nothing's going to hinder that.

When the Son of God returns, no roadblock from Satan can stand in the way! When God shatters the stillness of the night and rips the veil between this world and heaven, and when the King of kings comes back, all the enemies of God will be crushed under his feet. That's our ultimate hope.

He will rise up in the end. And we will reign with King Jesus. The Puritan writer John Trapp said, "He that rides to be crowned will not think much of a rainy day." There may be rainy days, dreary days of darkness, but we have hope because we know how the story ends. We know where we are going—to reign with our Lord.

So, expect supernatural opposition. But don't let it hinder your determination to break down barricades. Find strength in the joy of Jesus and his people, and in the hope of his ultimate return and victory, to fight another day as you follow your King.