

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

by Dean Sherman



You may believe spiritual warfare is only for Christians who happen to be "into" such things — or for obscure missionaries working in dark, heathen places. I'm sorry to say, this just isn't so. I wish we could all live in Disneyland, but we can't. There is a real devil and there are real demons. And every Christian is in a real war — a desperate, life-and-death struggle with a vicious enemy.

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This town isn't big enough for the two of us!

Where are the people who will stand in the gap for the structures, smash the principalities, pull down the strongholds, and drive out the darkness? A policeman's authority does him no good if he just rides around in his car all day. He must exercise it. Through prevailing prayer and resisting and cutting off the strategies of the enemy, we will see change in families, in cities, and in the world. Be as specific as you can be in spiritual warfare. Let the Holy Spirit lead you and energize you as you push back the powers of darkness and pray down the Kingdom into people's hearts.

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devil of all authority. Jesus died to destroy the works of Satan, which are, as mentioned in Isaiah 61, simply the end results of human beings giving themselves over to sin and selfishness.

After the Resurrection, Jesus gave that regained authority to us in His Name. That means *God has done everything to Satan He's going to do* — except for punishing him at the end! The rest is up to us. God said: *You resist the devil. You heal the sick. You cast out demons. You pray for the Kingdom to come and for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. I give you power over all the power of the enemy.* (Jas. 4:7; Lk. 10:9,19; Matt. 6:10; 16:19; Jn. 20:21-23)

God is looking for an army — people who know their authority and will exercise it. If we don't rise up to drive out the enemy, he'll stay in control. Like in the Promised Land, God gave the victory, but the people had to do the fighting. We need to get angry enough at the devil to refuse him access by defensive warfare — and then push him out with offensive warfare.

You might say, "Well, I'm not sure I'm ready for that. It's not my calling, I'm really into music." Or you might mistakenly think, "If I leave the devil alone, he'll leave me alone." But the war is on and we're in it whether we like it — or agree with it. It's not just for some Christians, and it's not just for some of the time. The war is on for every Christian, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You are engaged in spiritual warfare whether you know it or not — the Bible states it categorically in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...

That's a warning cry from the Bible for each of us! Be on the alert at all times. Be strong. Get your armor on... You're in a raging war! And the attack is not coming from people — but from unseen beings. There is a roster in hell and your name is on it.

Interestingly, this scripture uses the word "wrestle" to describe the conflict. The most disciplined athletes I know are wrestlers. In football, basketball, and most other sports, the players are given a "time out" to catch their breath. But not in wrestling. The wrestler has to be in top physical form. Once he enters the ring he can't let his guard down for even a second or his opponent will pin him to the mat.

Christians can't say, "Time out devil, I need a breather!" He doesn't take weekends or Mondays off. He doesn't take it easy on you when you've been through a tragedy or been ripped off. That's when he pours on the heat. He's the original kick-'em-while-they're-down person. He is totally evil. He has no sense of mercy, sympathy, or what it means to have a fair fight. There's no practice and no warm-up. Satan is fighting a real battle against every one of us. We need to learn the "Three R's" of spiritual warfare so we can fight back.

"Three R's" Of Spiritual Warfare

RECOGNIZE: Recognizing you're in a war is a big part of victory, because *knowing* the enemy's tactics is to be in the light — and the devil works in darkness. The devil takes advantage of our ignorance, but when there's light, he can't do what he planned.

The Bible teaches us to be alert, which means "to watch." We must keep our eyes on Jesus at all times — but also on the devil. The Bible says we must not be ignorant but instead, "stand firm against the devil's schemes." The enemies we face are not "bad vibes," or "negative energies in the universe," or the "dark side of the force." They are personalities who think, talk, listen, observe, and plan strategies. (II Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11)

If we watch, we'll recognize the strategies of the enemy in our lives as well as in society. Do you see a pattern of hurt and rejection in your life? Or perhaps you're bothered by suicidal thoughts, or by the slow deadly escape of dope and booze. Does something always seem to happen to keep your family or church in strife? Look for the enemy's strategies and recognize the patterns — then go to the second "R."

REFUSE: Refusing Satan is passive warfare. Once you recognize what he is up to, ignore it and avoid it. Turn away and begin to worship the Lord and lift Him up. Refuse to be hurt. Refuse to get angry. Just let it go by. That's warfare. Nothing defeats the devil faster than ignoring what he's trying to stir up.

RESIST: This is active warfare! We're told to "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." God won't resist him — you have to. Speak to him and say, "Devil, I cut off this strategy in Jesus' Name. You've been doing this to me for 15 years, but I'm on to you and IT'S OVER!" He may try it six more times, but when you've convinced him that you're convinced of your spiritual authority, he will stop. (Jas. 4:7; I Pet. 5:9)

How To Stay Balanced

How do we go to battle without becoming demon chasers? There are two extremes to avoid. Some people tend to blame every adversity on the devil, always assuming, "It's a demon!" They're impressed by the heaviness and the oppression. They know all the spirits and the "sub-spirits." This can be an unhealthy preoccupation.

But there are others who never admit the devil is doing anything. They don't want to even think about it. They say,

What a dynamic finale we had to our "Victory Over Satan" campaign last week! Our 10 minute prayer vigil for China was followed by a 15-course Chinese dinner!



“Let’s not give the devil publicity! Let’s just keep our eyes on the Lord.” They may be frightened or maybe they don’t want to be like some of the “demon chasers” they know. Unfortunately, you can’t make the enemy nonexistent by refusing to recognize he’s there.

So, how do you stay balanced? Don’t assume the devil is behind something, but don’t refuse to consider it either. How will you know? Ask God. When He shows you, that’s what the Bible calls “discernment.”

Be aware of what the devil does, but don’t be influenced by his activity. Being aware won’t hurt you – the Bible refers to demons and Satan all the time. But if you fall into the subtle trap of being influenced, Satan will have you focusing on him. Then you’ll end up with a big, complex devil and a relatively small God in your mind. Find out what the devil is doing, but spend more time studying God and His greatness.

Warfare: Defensive And Offensive

We need to defeat the devil on two fronts: the *defensive* and the *offensive*. God gave us weapons and armor, which means we’re prepared for both. If you’re a Christian, you’re ready! Christ is our armor, righteousness, salvation, and truth. Remember, “Greater is He who is *in me* than he who is in the world.” We can be “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” So let the weak say, “I am strong.” (Joel 3:10; II Cor. 10:4)

Defensive warfare has to do with you as an individual. To paraphrase a familiar saying, “The devil hates you and has a horrible plan for your life!” Ephesians 6:13 says, “... having done everything, to stand firm.” In sports, the defense’s job is to stand in front of the goal and keep the opponent out. We don’t struggle to get saved or stay saved. That’s a gift of God’s grace and He can keep us from falling. But we must defend our commitment from the enemy’s attacks, lies, seductions, and temptations. We must declare, “I’m standing firm, devil, and you are not coming through here!”

Three Areas To Defend

YOUR MIND. The devil loves to put thoughts into your mind. You can be born-again and heaven-bound, but if you have wrong thoughts, your effectiveness on earth is greatly diminished. We must war against thoughts that don’t agree with the truth. Analyze your thoughts. Just say to yourself, “Hey, thoughts! Where did you come from?” If it’s a thought of pride, fear, unbelief, lust, depression, or condemnation, it needs to be cast down. That’s something *you* have to do. Refuse to dwell on it. Turn your mind to God and make it agree with His Word. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

YOUR HEART. In this case, your “heart” means your attitudes and emotions. Wrong attitudes are killers. In Ephesians 4:27, we learn that as Christians we give opportunity to the devil if we don’t deal with our wrong attitudes. Arrogant, rebellious, unforgiving, and contentious attitudes open up a door for the enemy to enter our life, marriage, church, nation, and world.

The devil only has access to the world through people’s sin and selfishness. Jesus defeated every demonic power on the cross 2,000 years ago – but Satan is still active to the exact degree people allow him to be. Sinners are not the only ones allowing him to work. Christians allow him to work when we don’t deal with our wrong attitudes.

Ephesians 4:26 tells us, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” So we must deal with any wrong attitudes on a regular basis – like taking a shower or brushing our teeth. It’s something we must do. We “put off” the old man and “put on” the new

man. That keeps the devil shut down. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence...”

YOUR MOUTH. The mouth is a powerful instrument and the devil knows it. Our mouth has spiritual power for either good or evil. The same mouth can pronounce a blessing or a curse. (Jas. 3:10) Our words can be a vehicle for the human spirit, the Holy Spirit, or an evil spirit.

The enemy loves to inspire us to speak unbelief, slander, gossip, and hurtful, harsh sarcasm. Many of us carry wounds from things said to us years ago. Don’t let the devil bring curses through your mouth. Think! Pray what David prayed in Psalm 141:3, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Taking The Gates Of Hell

Offensive warfare is aimed at the world around you. It’s warfare done to advance God’s Kingdom into society. In sports the offense tries to find a way over, under, around, or through the opponent – to the place of scoring. Unfortunately, in spiritual warfare many Christians only do defense. They just hope to keep the devil off their backs from Sunday to Sunday. They pray the game ends 0 to 0. How boring! Let’s take the offensive. That’s what Jesus described in Matthew 16:18, “I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Offensive warfare is taking initiative against the gates. They won’t prevail if we move against them – but they will continue to stand if we don’t attack! We need strategies of prayer and service to smash down the gates of hell. These gates are listed in Ephesians 6:12. Let’s look at them.

RULERS OF THIS WORLD

The enemy is after authority because he wants to rule the whole earth. Human structures and their leaders are sources of power, so he seeks to control them. His main strategy is to assign spirit beings to attack existing authority structures so he can function through them. All of society is set up in authority structures: marriage, family, church, school, business, tribe, club, media, labor unions, cities, and nations. Spirit beings are assigned to capture these structures and rule them.

Like walls around an ancient city, authority is a wall around every structure in society. When authority is ungodly or breaks down from neglect or rebellion, the walls can be penetrated by the devil. Therefore, you are doing spiritual warfare by being good leaders and submitted followers. Romans 13:1-3 indicates that good authority hinders the attack of the enemy. We also do spiritual warfare by praying for these structures and for our leaders – standing in the gap and building up broken-down walls. (Ezek. 13:3-5; 22:30)



PRINCIPALITIES

In Daniel 10 there’s an angel who had just fought in the heavenlies with a being called the “prince of Persia.” Later in that chapter, the “prince of Greece” is mentioned. If there were princes of Persia and Greece then, there are princes of London, Los Angeles, Japan, Texas, and other regions today. The biblical use of the word “principality” – which means a specific territory ruled by a prince – shows Satan’s forces are assigned geographically and according to people groupings in society. That’s why you can stand on a border in Africa with your toes in a country where thousands get saved every week, and with your heels in a country where there are almost no Christians.

To combat these principalities, we must pray geographically and according to people groups. People groups consist of any dis-

tingent group in society with a common bond: children, senior citizens, refugees, homosexuals, racial groups, language groups, or occupational groups. The enemy knows each one and has them targeted with a specific attack. Every Christian needs to be a student of geography. How else can we push back the enemy?

We have let the enemy work unopposed in much of what he’s doing. He’s been systematically deceiving, binding, and destroying people groups and structures that no Christian has ever even prayed for, let alone served. The gates of hell *are* prevailing. We have the authority to knock the gates down, but we must identify them and aggressively move against them. We must target every people group with prayer and loving service.

POWERS OR STRONGHOLDS

The more we sin, the greater grip the enemy has on us. In fact, he grips *according to the kind* of evil we give ourselves over to. If a city gives itself to witchcraft, the enemy can assign a power of witchcraft. If a church gives itself to strife and division, a stronghold of strife is set up. These strongholds can come on individuals, families, cities, or nations – anyplace people choose to allow them.

God can reveal the predominant powers in a given situation. Then we can use our authority to break them in the name of Jesus. Sometimes we can break what has been binding a family, city, or church for years. Identifying these powers also helps us avoid their influence and live in the opposite spirit. For instance, if the power is greed, we give generously. If it’s pride, we humble ourselves. This is a powerful way of breaking strongholds.

FORCES OF DARKNESS

One of Satan’s main tactics is keeping people’s minds in darkness. He is the father of lies and a deceiver. Millions are supernaturally blinded by the complex network of lies he’s constructed – like atheism, evolution, heresies, cults, philosophies, and all the world religions.

This is why it’s so important to live out truth and preach the Gospel. Spiritual warfare can’t be separated from evangelism. If we want darkness erased, we have to put light into it. Christians who compromise aid the enemy because people can’t see the light. There are spirit beings trying to keep you from preaching the Gospel. That’s why most Christians never do. Through prayer, we can drive back the darkness hovering over people’s minds so we can share truth in loving and appropriate ways.

Exercising Our Authority

What can we do about all this? When God made man, He gave him a free will. Included in that free will was authority over Planet Earth. Psalm 115:16 declares, “The earth He has given to the sons of men.” We have the awesome power of choice. If we sin and act selfishly, we allow the enemy to work. But if we exercise our free will and authority in Jesus’ Name, we can drive the enemy out. It’s just that simple. Adam used his authority to disobey God, and opened the door for the enemy to work on the earth through people.

Jesus came to take back the authority Adam gave away. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus “disarmed,” or stripped, the