

Spiritual Warfare Basics

“It is the image of God reflected in you that so enrages hell; it is this at which the demons hurl their mightiest weapons.” -Puritan William Gurnall

We were born into a world at war. That is reality. To overcome an enemy, we first have to acknowledge we have one. We have to know what our enemies are about. We have to know how to defeat them. Until Christ returns, there will be warfare raging on three fronts: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Ephesians 2:1-3—*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

Dr. Mark Bubeck, author of many books including the *The Adversary* and founder of ICBC, refers to *“the World as our external enemy, the Flesh as the internal enemy, and the Devil as the infernal enemy.”*

Christ Has Won the Victory Over our Three Enemies:

1. The World

- John 16:33—*“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*
- 1 John 5:4—*“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”*

2. The Flesh

- Galatians 5:16, 17—*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”*

3. The Devil

- John 16:11—*“concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”*
- 1 John 2:14—*“I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”*
- 1 John 4:4—*“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

Maintaining a Biblical Balance in Spiritual Warfare

C.S. Lewis, in the preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, says, “*There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors.*”

Ephesians 6:10-12—“*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*”

- **The kingdom of darkness is set-up like a military regiment with levels of authority. It is a top-down authority structure.**

Lucifer (Ephesians 2:2- prince of the power of the air; 1 John 5:19- “*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*”) There are principalities (prince or ruler over a nation), powers (authorities, which exercise authority at the city/state level), rulers of darkness (powerful demonic forces against the individual and church), spiritual hosts (the evil bent of opposing spiritual forces).

- **The Kingdom of God is a bottom-up and inside-out structure. Jesus Christ is the Prophet, Priest and King who rules the earth.** (Ephesians 1:21—“*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*”)

Christ works and rules in individual hearts, then marriages, then families, churches, communities, etc... (Matthew 5:14 “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*”)

The big question: Can Christians be influenced by Satan? YES!

(1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:12, 1 John 4:3, 1 John 5:19)

- **Satan’s goals** (John 10:10—“*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*”)
 - ◇ **Steal:** Satan comes feloniously as a thief to take away your freedom in Christ; withdrawing it undetectably and gaining it gradually. He does this through temptation and our succumbing to a lifestyle of besetting sin.
 - ◇ **Kill:** Satan comes to unlawfully kill the heart of a human being with premeditated malice. He does this through rejection and the lies that come in the message of that wounding (wounds, lies, vows).
 - ◇ **Destroy:** To lay waste, to make desolate your life. Satan desires to influence you to walk in the flesh and continue to make sinful choices that will bring destruction to your life, marriage, family and future generations.

Spiritual Warfare Principles

- **The sovereignty of God in our spiritual warfare worldview brings balance.**
2 Corinthians 12:7-9—“*So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’*”
- **For the Christian, demons are spirits of influence, not control.**
In his book *Spiritual Warfare*, Dr. Timothy Warner comes to the conclusion, “*Spiritual possession clearly implies ownership and would seem to include the control of one’s eternal destiny. It would seem impossible to be owned and controlled by Satan and have a saving relationship with Christ at the same time. So if the question is, ‘Can a Christian be demon-possessed?’ the answer is clearly no.*” (*Wheaton, Ill.; Crossway, 1991*)
- **Satan wants you to make agreements with his lies.**
Satan is a liar. (John 8:44) Any words or suggestions entering into your mind that try to influence you and bring discouragement, condemnation, accusation, confusion, or counsel contrary to the Word of God are coming from the Enemy.
- **Satan will be allowed by God to tempt you.**
1 Thessalonians 3:5—“*For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.*”

How Satan Gains Influence in Your Life

- **Pride** (James 4:6)
- **Bitterness:** “*‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*” (*Ephesians 4:26, 27*)
- **Rebellion:** “*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry....*” (*1 Samuel 15:23*)
- **Sexual immorality** (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20)
- **Spiritual counterfeits:** false gospel, spirits, false Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:3, 4)
- **Fear:** “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” (*2 Timothy 1:7*)
- **Guilt** (1 Timothy 1:18,19)
- **Unhealthy relationships/soul ties** (1 Corinthians 5:9-12)
- **Idolatry** (Exodus 20:4, 5)
“*What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils*” (*1 Cor. 10:19-21*)

How to Overcome Spiritual Warfare Battles in Your Life

- **Repentance** (*1 John 1:9, James 5:16*)
- **Renunciation** (*Ephesians 5:11, Titus 2:12*)
- **Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee** (*James 4:7-10*)
- **Resist steadfast in the faith** (*1 Peter 5:6-10*)
- **Learn to suffer well** (*1 Peter 4:1,2, Romans 8:17*)
- **Armor of God** (*Ephesians 6:10-18*)

The Armor of God

1. Belt of Truth (Ephesians 6:14)

The first piece of armor is the belt of truth. *“Stand therefore, having your loins girded with truth...”* (Ephesians 6:14a) Since a significant part of ancient combat was hand-to-hand, a loose tunic was a hindrance and even a danger. Before battle, the tunic was carefully cinched up and tucked into the heavy leather belt that girded (restrained) the soldier’s loins.

God’s belt of truth is what “ties it all together,” demonstrating that the believer is ready for battle. The Greek word for truth in verse 14 is *alethia*, which refers to the accuracy of truth or quality of a truthful attitude in thinking and speaking. Two other Scriptures encourage us to gird up our loins. I Peter 1:13 says, *“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* And Luke 12:35-36b says, *“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord...”*

Consider these points for using the belt of truth:

- Since Satan is a liar (John 8:44), your belt of truth is always under attack in one or more forms:
 1. Lies about the character of God.
 2. Deception about who you are in Christ.
 3. Lies promoting fear about life’s future direction.
 4. Temptation to sin.
- Seek the truth in close relationship and dependence on the **person** of truth – Jesus Christ (*John 14:6*).
- Read, study, and apply the Scriptures, letting the **Word** of truth sanctify your life daily (*2 Corinthians 6:7, John 17:15*).
- Submit to the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit, the **Spirit** of truth (*John 14:17, 16:13*).
- Resist the enemy by choosing, knowing, and standing in truth.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness (Ephesians 6:14b)

A key component in the armor of God is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects my most vulnerable area – my heart, the home of my feelings and emotions.

In Christ's time on earth, no Roman soldier would go into the battle without his breastplate—a tough, sleeveless piece of armor that covered his full torso. The purpose of the breastplate is to protect the vital organs, including the heart. In Jewish thinking the heart represented the mind, will, and emotions. The mind and emotions are two areas where Satan most fiercely attacks believers. The enemy will attack to wound our hearts with condemnation and accusation that leads to despair. If we trust ourselves for our own righteousness we are left defenseless.

Three Ways that Satan Attacks

- Accusations (Revelation 12:10) —Despair comes from believing what Satan says rather than what God says about my righteousness in Christ. (*2 Corinthians 5:21*)
- Condemnation (Romans 8:1) —Satan condemns me to keep me from coming to God.
- Spiritual pride—trusting in my own righteousness rooted in pride.

Three Ways to Stand against Satan

- Confess all sin. Apply the principle of confession by acknowledging sin and agreeing with God about it (*1 John 1:9*).
- Stand with Christ's righteousness around you like a breastplate. Satan has nothing to accuse us of because we are made righteous in Christ. (*Romans 8:33, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:8,9*).
- Keep a clear conscience before God and man. This is part of standing firm in our righteousness in Christ (*Acts 24:16*).

3. The Gospel of Peace (Ephesians 6:15)

If you are to persevere in the Christian life and not be defeated by the wiles of Satan, then you must put on this armor, and God will keep you safe unto the day of salvation. In this context, Ephesians 6:15 tells us to have our feet shod with the “readiness of the Gospel...” John Piper writes, “*If you put on shoes of readiness, then the idea would seem to be readiness to do what feet are for, namely moving. And if the readiness is readiness of the Gospel, it probably means ready to move with the Gospel—move with Gospel power and for Gospel purposes.*”

Some people ask this question, “Can God really forgive me for such horrible sin?” They feel they can never be good enough for God. They are overcome with accusations. I believe Satan defeats Christians by questioning the limits of God's grace and mercy in their lives.

I am here to share with counselees the great news: Christ is victorious over sin and Satan! There is no more condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus. In Colossians 2:13-15, the Bible tells us that God made us alive in Christ and He forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record of the charges against us—past, present, and future. He took that record of our sin and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. There can be no accusation made against God's elect. Let us stand ready in the Gospel of peace. Romans 5:1 says, “*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Because of the good news of the gospel, we are at peace with Him, and we stand in the confidence of God's forgiveness, His union with us, and His commitment to continually fight for us. We can put on the “readiness of the Gospel” and boldly proclaim to others the victory that Christ has for them.

4. The Shield of Faith (Ephesians 6:16)

All Christians experience times of spiritual attack. God permits these times of testing to give us opportunity to take up the shield of faith against the enemy.

The Apostle Paul tells us that part of putting on the full armor of God is taking up the shield of faith. We must pick up the shield of faith and hold it in place in order to defend ourselves in battle. The particular Roman shield to which Paul is referring was 4 feet long and 2.5 feet wide. It protected the whole body. The other pieces of the armor left some parts of the body vulnerable, and thus the shield was required to stop otherwise lethal penetrations. When the spiritual battle becomes heated with flying arrows, the Christian takes up the shield of faith, "...wherewith [he] shall be able to quench (extinguish) all the fiery darts of the wicked." (Ephesians 6:16). The Roman shield was made with linen and hide that could be dipped in water. When the fiery darts hit it, they were extinguished.

We can enlarge and strengthen our shield of faith by spending daily time in the Word of God. Many clients whom we counsel struggle with faithful Bible study and application. In my personal life, and in the lives of those I counsel, I find that without consistent time spent with God and His Word, we are left defenseless. The victorious Christian will be found studying and applying the Scripture. "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith...*" (1 Peter 5:8-9). Do you truly believe in your heart that what God says is really true? As you pick up the shield of faith, you can stop the flaming arrows of the evil one. You will be enabled to stand firm in the spiritual battles of life.

5. The Helmet of Salvation (Ephesians 6:17)

This helmet is another piece of armor that is required for spiritual victory. A Roman soldier would be foolish to go into battle without his helmet. Helmets were made in one of two ways: either with leather with some patches of metal on it, or of solid cast metal. The Roman's helmet would protect the head from arrows (fiery darts), but its primary function was to ward off blows from a very destructive weapon called a broadsword. The broadsword was three to four feet long. It had a massive handle that was held with both hands like a baseball bat. The enemy soldier lifted it over his head and brought it down on his opponent's head. This weapon dealt such a crushing blow to the skull that a helmet was necessary to deflect it. God's helmet of salvation protects us from Satan's deathblow.

The word *salvation* in the context of Ephesians 6:17 emphasizes the "ongoing deliverance" which our salvation brings. Here, Paul is not concerned with Satan taking away our salvation. He is referring to our hope of deliverance in times of spiritual battle. Paul is quoting from Isaiah 59:17, "*For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.*" The helmet of salvation delivers us from the most menacing of all attacks. This crucial attack comes within the mind as our enemy feeds us doubts and lies about Christ, His Word and His protection. No matter how bad things may become and no matter how hopeless and helpless our lives may seem, God is with us. God has already rescued us from the bondage to the prince of the realm of the air, and He has already seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:1-10). By appropriating this salvation as our helmet, we have every reason to remain confident of our victory in Christ.

6. The Sword of the Spirit: The Word of God (Ephesians 6:17)

Paul tells us in Romans 13:12-14, “...let us put on the armor of light...put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ...” We do not put on the armor of God to wait for the enemy to attack, but rather we are to join with Christ in an offensive battle in which we take up the Word of God. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul expresses what is needed for the believer to overcome Satan and his hosts when he says to take “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” Sadly, many Christians today have become passive in utilizing the sixth piece of God’s armor. There is a lack of study, understanding, and application. This passivity has produced a deficiency of the wisdom and knowledge of God’s truth. People thus become easy prey to the destructive forces of evil. Christians are turning for help from many counseling philosophies and techniques that ignore vital Biblical truth. This has produced an excess of self-help books for solving problems that replaces good exegetical study of God’s Word. When the enemy comes in like a flood, few have the Biblical discernment to provide a response to the deceptions of Satan. Hebrews 4:12 teaches: “*For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”

Personal Evaluation Questions

1. Do I have a healthy, Biblical view of Satan and his kingdom?
2. Are there strongholds in my life that have allowed Satan to gain influence?
3. Do I trust in the sovereignty of God when it comes to matters of spiritual warfare?
4. Am I submitting to God and resisting the devil?
5. How can I use the armor God has provided in overcoming Satan’s attacks?

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