

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1983 (Rev. 86,89,92,95,05)

Introduction: I have read in print and have personally heard pastors and theologians state two basic views on "spiritual warfare." One view is that there is no "battle" with the flesh, the world, or with the Devil today. They say that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection provided everything needed for a victorious and joyous spiritual life. They say that we just need to change from the old Adam into the new Adam. They say that the flesh is dead, the world has no effect, and the Devil has no power. Therefore, according to their viewpoint, there is no such thing as "spiritual warfare" against the world, the flesh and the Devil. View two is that every problem we have in the flesh and in the world is related to the Devil and his demons. This view is called the "deliverance ministry" of spiritual warfare. I do not hold to either view point and I believe the Bible does not teach either view.

David Powlison, who has studied this area of spiritual warfare in depth, writes, "The modern age deadens people to the reality of spiritual warfare."¹ We live in an age where Christians, pastors, and congregations do not follow sound doctrine and do not want doctrine to guide their lives. Every day Christians are tempted to follow philosophies that are actually void of God's truth or against God's church.

Christians, pastors and congregations, are not prepared for "spiritual battle" because they do not understand the "battle." Michael Horton writes, "Spiritual warfare is real but often misunderstood these days. ...it centers on truth and error rather than merely a display of force in 'power encounters.'"² "Ignorance," "denial," and the "deliverance ministry" have replaced the truth of God's Word on "spiritual warfare" within the church.

We need to go to God's world and study the true nature of "spiritual warfare." After studying the area of "spiritual warfare," I believe God's Word teaches there is a "spiritual battle" going on within, around and against the Christian. Ronald Nash writes, "From its inception, the Christian church has been involved in battles involving ideas, theories, systems of thought, presuppositions, and arguments. Signs of such battles in the world of ideas can be found all through the New Testament."³

The reality and intensity of the "spiritual warfare" can be seen from the terms God's Word uses to describe this "spiritual warfare."

- (1.) The word "enemy" or "enmity," (Gk. "echthros") which means "hostile, enemy, or adversary," (Matt. 5:43-44; 10:36; Lk. 27:35).
- (2.) The word "war" or "battle," (Gk. "polemos")
- (3.) The word "war" (Gk. "strateia" and approximately 7 other derivatives) meaning, "to carry on a military campaign, and can refer to troops, a soldier, a general, or an army."
- (4.) The word "battle," (Gk. "machaira" "mache" "machomair") meaning "battle, sword, and fight."
- (5.) The word "weapon" (Gk. "hoplon" "hoplidzo") meaning "weapon or equip."
- (6.) The words for "armor" (Gk. "panoplia"), "belt" (Gk. "peridzonnumi"), "breastplate," (Gk. "thorax"), "shoes" (Gk. "hupodeo"), "shield" (Gk. "thyreos"), "helmet" (Gk. "perikephalaia"), and a "sword" (Gk. "machaira"), (Eph. 6:14-17).

From these terms describing the "spiritual warfare" Christians face, God's Word reveals several details.

1. WHY DOES A "SPIRITUAL WARFARE" EXIST?

A. There was a great "war" (Gk. "polemos") in heaven between Michael with his angels and the devil with his angels, and the devil did not win but was cast out of heaven, (Rev. 12:7; Isa. 14:12; Ez. 28:11). Ever since then the devil has been against God and the things of God.

B. Man in his natural fallen state is an "enemy" (Gk. "echithros") of God, (Rom. 5:10; 8:7) and seeks to destroy the church, (Gal. 1:13, 23).

C. There are people who will take a position or make a choice that will place them in a position or "battle" (Gk. "theomachos") against God and the things of God, (Acts 5:39).

D. Believers in church "war" against each other because of the "lust of the flesh," (Eph. 4:1).

E. The "devil," (Eph. 6:11) with his "darts" (Eph. 6:16); and the "darkness of this age," (Eph. 6:12) and the "day in which we live" (Eph. 6:13), are waging "spiritual attacks" upon believers because they are "in Christ," (Eph. 6:12).

F. God will "fight" (Gk. "polemeo") against those who do not repent, (Rev. 2:16).

2. WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THIS "SPIRITUAL WARFARE?"

A. God is involved because He has "enemies" (Gk. "echithrous," 1 Cor. 15:25).

B. Anyone who is a friend of the world is an "enemy" (Gk. "echithra") of God, (Ja. 4:4).

C. Man in his natural fallen state is involved in a "spiritual warfare" because he is an "enemy" (Gk. "echithros") of God, (Rom. 5:10; 8:7).

D. Believers, due to their spiritual position in Christ, are involved in a spiritual "war," (Gk. "strateuometha," 2 Cor. 10:3) which often starts at the new birth when we are illuminated, (Heb. 10:32).

E. The devil and his forces are involved in this "spiritual warfare," (Eph. 6:12).

3. FROM WHERE DO BELIEVERS EXPERIENCE "SPIRITUAL WARFARE?"

There are basically three sources of opposition to the Christian. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes, "At the moment of salvation the believer enters upon a three-fold conflict which is superhuman in its forces and far-reaching in its possibilities both as to tragic failure or glorious victory."⁴ Charles Swindol and Roy Zuck write, "The world, the flesh, and the devil were never anyone's friends anyway. But at conversion they become the special enemies of the Christian and strongly oppose Christian sanctification. To ignore the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and expect them to go away quietly is not God's way to deal with them. Our spiritual opposition is real, but so is Christ's victory over the world, the flesh and the Devil. By faith we can claim Christ's victory as our victory, overcome our spiritual opposition, and progress in sanctification."⁵ Paul Enns

writes, "There is a spiritual war against the Christian life. "The Christian's conflict with sin arises from three areas: (1.) the world, (2.) the flesh, and (3.) the devil."⁶

A. Believers "wrestle" (Gk. "pale") against the Devil (Eph. 6:12), the "devil" has schemes against God and the Christian, (Eph. 6:11), the "devil" has darts he throws at Christians, (Eph. 6:16).

B. Believers "fight" (Gk. "polemeo") against the flesh. Fleshly "lusts" cause "war" (Gk. "palemeo") and "fighting" (Gk. "machomai") among believers and in the church, (Ja. 4:1-2). Fleshly "lusts" "war" (Gk. "polemeo") against the soul, (1 Pt. 2:11).

C. Believers "fight" against the "world" as found in the words present "age" and the "day" in which we live, (Eph. 6:12-13).

4. HOW ARE BELIEVERS TO FIGHT THIS "SPIRITUAL WAR?"

A. The ministry is a "warfare:" (1.) pastors are "to please him who enlisted him as a soldier," (2 Tim. 2:4); (2.) pastors are to "wage the good warfare," (1 Tim. 1:18); (3.) pastors are to "fight the good fight of faith," (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7); (4.) pastors are "to endure hardship as a good soldier," (2 Tim. 2:3); and, (5.) pastors are "not to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life," (2 Tim. 2:4).

B. The Christian life is a "fight" in a disciplined way to keep himself in subjection, (1 Cor. 9:26).

C. Spiritual strength is needed for this "spiritual battle," (1.) be "strong" (Gk. "dunamos") in the Lord, and (2.) in the "power" (Gk. "kratie") (3.) of His "might" (Gk. "ischious"), (Eph. 6:10).

D. God is presently involved in this battle, (1 Cor. 15:25).

E. Believers have mighty "spiritual" weapons to do "spiritual warfare," (1.) to pull down strongholds, (2.) casting down arguments and (3.) casting down everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, (4.) bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and (5.) ready to punish all disobedience (2 Cor. 10:3-6).

F. Believers have "spiritual armor" to do "spiritual warfare," (Eph. 6:11-18): (1.) girded with truth, (2.) breastplate of righteousness, (3.) feet shod with the gospel, (4.) shield of faith, (5.) helmet of salvation, (6.) sword of the spirit, (7.) communication of prayer.

5. WHEN WILL THIS "SPIRITUAL WARFARE" END?

A. In the Tribulation Period, the beast will make "war" (Gk. "polemos") with the Tribulation saints, (Rev. 11:7; 13:4,7) and will "war" (Gk. "polemos") against the Lord, (Rev. 17:14).

B. At the end of the Tribulation Period the armies of heaven will descend with our Lord Jesus Christ to make "war" (Gk. "polemos") and to "battle" (Gk. "polemos") with the Devil and his forces, (Rev. 16:14; 19:11,14,19).

C. At the end of the Millennial Kingdom the Lord will "battle" (Gk. "polemos") against the Devil and his followers and be victorious, (Rev. 20:7-8).

Conclusion: What happens when we fail to recognize the "spiritual warfare" that involves every Christian?

David Powlison writes, "Downplaying or demythologizing spiritual warfare usually creates a pernicious domino effect. (1.) Prayer and worship become hollow forms. (2.) God's power and aid are little needed and little expected. (3.) Sin becomes psychopathology or social maladjustment. The Bible becomes a remote object, not the voice of the living God. (4.) Evangelism becomes vaguely embarrassing; (5.) death to self is distastefully fanatical. (6.) Normal life becomes, well, normal: work and unemployment, marriage and divorce, sickness and health, the economy and politics, traffic jams and weather, war and peace. As biblical Christians, however, we deny that this secularized rationalism makes up the Christian faith. Normal everyday life is charged with importance. We know that there is warfare to be waged, and we do not deny the existence and work of our foe."⁷

End notes:

¹Power Encounters, by David Powlison, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, Pp. 20-24.

²Power Religion, Michael Horton, Ed., Chicago: Moody, 1992, p. 16-17.

³World-Views in Conflict, by Ronald Nash, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, p. 12.

⁴"Anthropology," Lewis Sperry Chafer, Bibliotheca Sacra, July 1934, Vol. 91, p. 267.

⁵Understanding Christian Theology, Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 977.

⁶The Moody Handbook of Theology, Paul Enns, Chicago: Moody, 1989, p. 313.

⁷Power Encounters, by David Powlison, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, Pp. 20-24.