

17B THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Whether a believer is a Christian pacifist or a just war proponent, he or she will soon find themselves involved in an ongoing battle. That battle, however, will be waged against spiritual enemies, not other people.

Ephesians 6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Satan and demons? That must be strictly superstition, right? Nobody in our modern world would believe in a struggle with spirits, would they?

The Bible does present Satan as a real being. Genesis introduces him. Jesus addressed him directly. The Epistles describe him.

R. C. Sproul put it this way:

I believe that if we are to be consistent Christians, believing all of the Bible rather than portions of it, we must recognize that the supernatural places and beings described on its pages are real. There is an uncompromised supernaturalism at the heart of the Christian worldview, and we must not let the world's skepticism with regard to these things affect our belief systems. We must trust and affirm that there is much more to reality than meets the eye. [1]

It is essential to realize that we have a spiritual enemy and we are in the midst of a war, whether we want to be or not. Many missionaries to primitive cultures have reported some hair-raising personal accounts of confrontations with spiritual powers.

Starting points in spiritual warfare:

- Realize that there's a war going on.
- Know your enemy.
- Know your enemy's tactics.
- Know your resources.

The reality of Satan and demons may help to explain a number of disturbing things in our world:

- Mass murderers
- Hitler's program
- Hostility of cults and false religions
- Pagan spiritism
- Strongest addictions

There are Biblical guidelines for dealing with Satan, and there are sensationalist activities that we need to avoid:

- Screaming at the devil
- Prolonged and inflated commands to Satan
- Casting demons out of everyone
- Diagnosing demons for every human failing (demons of laziness, sloppiness, rudeness, irritability...)

We have an enemy, and the Bible tells us about him. Basically, Satan hates your guts and has a horrible plan for your life. How does Satan work?

1. He hides
2. He frightens
3. He runs

Satan tries to get non-Christians to stay where they are (where he is), and he tries to get Christians to sin. The battlefield is usually our mind, part of what the Bible calls “the heart.” “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies...” (Matthew 5:19). Satan tries to brainwash people. There are certain things that you encounter that trigger evil or unclean thoughts. How can we break the pattern? It doesn’t work to say, “I won’t think about fox’s tails.” We need to reprogram our minds with scripture. Suppose that every time you pick up your toothbrush your mind is flooded with hateful thoughts towards someone. Reprogramming could mean quoting “Thou shalt not kill,” and praying for help-and for that person- every time you lift that toothbrush. (God is pleased, and Satan hates that.)

The Bible talks about spiritual warfare (Eph. 6). If we’re really living in a wartime situation, what should we expect to happen? (To get a behind-the-scenes picture read Peretti’s *This Present Darkness*. [2]) Few people live like we’re at war. If God’s people refuse to believe that a spiritual war is going on He may allow them to get into a physical war to wake them up. Believers are often like the nearsighted Mr. Magoo in the old cartoons. Things happen all around us, and we’re oblivious. (A piano falls out of a window overhead, an angel deflects it, and we say, “Huh? Did I just hear a noise? I guess not.”)

Ephesians 6:12: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” During spiritual battle we’re not kept cozy inside our heads while storm troopers are searching outside the door. Instead, the battle is inside our heads: depression, fear, confusion, discouragement, oppression, despair. This kind of battle can almost destroy someone who isn’t expecting it.

You will be attacked regularly. Prepare for it. You either win or lose. Why can we read a novel for two hours or more but get sleepy whenever we try to read the Bible? Ask the Holy Spirit to

reveal any unconfessed sin, then confess and forsake it. Sins become addictions when we choose them on a regular basis.

Be careful of one of Satan's accusations: "You don't do enough for God." The normal reaction is for us to find more things to do. (Unfortunately, many churches promote this.) Even Christians may encourage you to get more involved, but it may be in the wrong things. Don't judge your life by others' lives. (Satan loves to get us to look at others.) Find out what God wants you to do.

Demons love to accuse believers of past sins, but I John 1:9 says that if we've confessed it God was faithful to forgive it. If we're continually being reminded of it, that's from Satan, not from the Holy Spirit.

Satan today? Really?

R. C. Sproul wrote:

"If the right hand doesn't get you, then the left one will." This maxim expresses the double jeopardy faced by a prizefighter in the boxing ring. Like the ambidextrous pugilist, our adversary, Satan, has a two-pronged strategy. To defeat him, we must wage war on two fronts. The tactic is simple. He conquers by spreading disinformation about himself. He divides the church by creating two myths, two erroneous views of his own identity: The first is that he is a myth. The second is that he is as powerful as God.

The first deception from Satan about Satan is that he is a ridiculous myth. As a mythical figure, he can be put in the category of goblins, ghosts, and things that go bump in the night. Nothing pleases Satan more than to persuade people that he doesn't exist at all...

If we are convinced that Satan doesn't exist, we will hardly waste time preparing to make war against him or find ways to resist him. To put on armor to ward off imaginary fiery darts is as much a fool's errand as Don Quixote's tilting at windmills. On the other hand, a stealth bomber can have its way, unimpeded in its mission, if the enemy is persuaded that there is no such thing as a stealth bomber.

Satan loves the modern image of himself. Who gives credence to an ugly little imp in red flannel underwear with cloven feet and horns, bearing a trident and flashing a diabolical grin? [3]

Sproul notes that medieval believers were responsible for the cartoonish caricature that many associate with Satan. Noting that Satan's first sin was pride, they concluded that one way to defeat him was to mock him (picturing him in a red suit with horns). The following generations didn't understand their strategy and dismissed the idea of an evil personality altogether. [4]

CS Lewis wrote:

"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 and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." [5]

Purely naturalistic explanations are not adequate for describing many forms of evil in the world. Although the impact of sin on the human soul explains much of the proliferation of evil, some situations are still so abhorrent or inexplicable that they suggest a demonic origin. The horrors of an Auschwitz or of a mother roasting her own child to death imply a powerful force leading humanity to destruction. [6]

Satan is described as

- The Serpent (Rev. 12:9)
- The Dragon (Rev. 12:3)
- Lucifer (“Light-Bearer”) (Isa. 14)
- Angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14)
- Father (father) of Lies (John 8:44)
- Prince (prince) of the Power of the Air (Eph. 2:2)
- Ruler of this world (John 16:11)
- God (god) of this age (2 Cor. 4:4)

He is far more powerful than any human, yet is a created being, in no sense omniscient or omnipresent, and he has been utterly defeated by Christ at the cross. If we resist him, he will flee. (James 4:7)

Scripture indicates that he rebelled against God. His origin is probably described in Isaiah 14:12-19 and Ezekiel 28:12-19- an archangel who became lifted up by pride.

Three individual in Scripture seem to be analogies of Satan:

- Pharaoh – enslaved God’s people; tried to kill all the male offspring
- Haman- wanted to kill all of God’s people throughout the Persian Empire; desired to kill, steal, and destroy
- Herod- wanted to destroy the Messiah; killed the male children in Bethlehem

Know your enemy:

- Satan has a kingdom and an army of fallen angels. Satan counterfeits what God provides.
- He tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen.3)
- He physically attacked Job (but had to have God’s permission). (Job 1)
- He tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4).
- God permitted Satan to “sift” Peter (Lk. 22: 31-32)
- His ultimate destruction is described in Revelation (Rev. 20).

Our struggles

C. S. Lewis wrote a very insightful book concerning human nature and the ways Satan can tempt and influence us. *Screwtape Letters* [7] is written as an exchange between an apprentice demon (Wormwood) and a seasoned devil, Screwtape, assistant to “Our Father Below”.

Some of Lewis’ insights:

Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good - above all, that we are better than someone else - I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil. [8]

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. [9]

Whatever men expect, they soon come to think they have a right to; the sense of disappointment can, with very little skill on our part, be turned into a sense of injury. (senior devil speaking) [10]

From Screwtape we learn that temptation is essentially a campaign of distortion, exaggeration, manipulation, lies that tempt the individual one way or another to focus on the self, to become selfish, self-important, preoccupied with one's own appearance, one's own standing, a constant appeal to vanity—the beginnings of hell on earth.

Lewis cleverly demonstrates that “big sins” start as small ones, but are predicated on the one, essential step to exalting the self, promoting pride as essentially the deepest, longest, widest abyss between God and His creatures. “Why use adultery when golf will do?” [11]

Satan's goals (Tony Evans): [12]

1. To prevent people from salvation
2. To keep believers ineffective-
 - Silent
 - Discouraged
 - Separated
 - Bogged down with sin
 - Prayerless
3. To oppose/frustrate God's plans

Satan's tactics and tools: [13]

- Lies/deceptions (Rev. 12:9)
- Counterfeits (views of good and evil, views of truth, religion, teachers, Gospel-Gal. 1:11-12)
- Temptations (Matt. 4)
- Accusations/slanders (Rev. 12:10)
- Fear, including fear of death
- Opposition – When we try to live for the Lord and anything that brings God glory

Guidelines for spiritual warfare:

- Fill your mind with Scripture.
- Pray continually.
- Praise God regularly.
- Expect opposition to anything good.
- Expect temptation.
- Avoid places and situations where you're vulnerable.
- Look for a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13)
- Avoid all areas of Spiritism: séances, fortune tellers, Ouija boards...

Satan himself attacked Adam and Eve, Job, and Jesus. For most of us, however, any low-level demon could be dispatched to mess with us.

It is usually not even necessary for spiritual forces to tempt us –our own flesh and the lures of the world can trap us effectively.

There is no evidence in scripture that Satan can read our minds. He doesn't have to. It is only necessary to watch us for a while to see where our weaknesses are.

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6: 14-18 outlines six items of armor for the believer to enable us to stand against Satan's onslaughts. Likely the apostle Paul saw these daily when he was a prisoner of Rome.

Item	Function	Guards against attacks	Additional verses
Belt : truth	Holds armor together	Lies	1 Pet. 1:13 John 8:32
Breastplate: righteousness	Protects our chest, including our heart	Impurity Questions of our identity	1 John 2:29 Phil. 3:9
Shoes: preparation of the Gospel of peace	Protects our feet, gives solid footing	Lack of peace Broken relationships Confusion of purpose	2 Tim. 4:2 Eph. 4:2
Shield: faith	Protects us from frontal attack and fiery darts/arrows	Trials Accusations Temptations Lies	Heb. 11 2 Cor. 5:7 1 John 5:4-5
Helmet: salvation	Protects our head, including our mind	Doubt Lies Fears	Rom. 12:1-2 Isa. 59:17 Phil. 4:7-8

Sword: God's word	Protects our thoughts; Offensive weapon	Temptation	Heb. 4:12 2 Tim. 3:16-17
Prayer	Offensive weapon	(Offensive)	1 Thess. 5:16

Each of these relate directly to Christ and our position in Him.

The Belt of Truth

Jesus Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

The belt holds clothing together and acts as a place to hang a canteen and a sword. The believer needs to live in truth and continually to speak truth (in love). Knowing truth can help us avoid common lies:

- “God couldn’t love you.”
- “You’ll never amount to anything.”
- “You could never be forgiven.”
- “There is no hope.”
- “You might as well sin.”

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Our own righteousness is filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), but we receive the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

The breastplate covered the chest of the soldier and protected vital organs. We are covered and protected by God’s righteousness. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

Footwear: Preparation of the Gospel of Peace

The soldier needed protection for his feet and the ability to stand firm or advance without slipping. Here the emphasis is on both the Gospel and our readiness to declare it.

The Shield of Faith

Bob Mumford described the shield: [14]

*A shield is an unusual piece of equipment. It makes the soldier mobile and gives him the ability to progress freely...There is also a significance to the size and shape of the shields carried by soldiers in Paul’s day. They were not the small, curved pieces of armor that we usually think of {Captain America’s shield}. They were rather four feet long and two and a half feet across – giving fitting meaning to the fact that the Greek word for shield stems from **door**. Traditionally, a shield had the name of the soldier who bore it boldly emblazoned on its front-defiant and confident. This should inspire us and show us how we should carry his vital piece of our armor.*

Faith relates to trust in God and seven truths of salvation:

1. *Total assurance that our sins are forgiven (Eph. 1:7)*
2. *Reception of the Holy Spirit as an earnest of eternal life. (Eph. 1:13-14)*
3. *Certainty that nothing can separate us from God's love. (Rom. 8: 38-39)*
4. *Establishment of our lives under the government of grace. (Eph. 2:8)*
5. *Acknowledgment that Christ has made an open defeat of His satanic enemies. (Col. 2:15)*
6. *Confidence that Christ is now ruling over everything and everyone. (Eph. 1:22)*
7. *Certainty that Christ Himself dwells in our hearts. (Eph. 3:17) [15]*

The “fiery darts,” that should land in the shield and not in us, were arrows dipped in tar pitch that pierced armor and continued to burn. Some are satanic assaults in the form of demanding thoughts and compulsions. Some are false accusations by others. [16]

Because Christ has already won the victory we are able to make these bold declarations:

We live by faith. (Gal. 2:20)

We stand by faith. (Rom. 11:20)

We obtain a good report by faith. (Heb. 11:2-6)

We walk by faith. (2 Cor. 5:7)

We conquer/overcome by faith. (1 John 5:4-5)

We resist the devil by faith. (1 Pet. 5:9) [17]

Since God is in control and can turn evil directed against us into good, we can say with faith, “Nothing can enter my life unless it has passed through God's hands.”

The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet of salvation provides optimistic hope in the Lord. If we have trusted Christ, we are His responsibility and He is working for us and in us.

The helmet guards the mind, a special target of the devil. An unguarded mind makes the Christian soldier easy prey to the lies of the devil. Such a mind is vulnerable to the deceptions of the enemy. Paul clarifies this piece of the wardrobe in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 as he says, “And for a helmet, the hope of salvation.” (Here the word “hope” suggests not a contingent wish but an absolute certainty!) [18]

The Sword of the Spirit

The sword is an offensive weapon, designed for close combat.

I take up the sword of the Spirit, the Living Word of God, which is powerful and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of my heart. I overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb and the word of my testimony. I receive the Word of God implanted. (Heb. 4:12, Luke 4, Rev. 12:11, James 1:21) [19]

Praying at All Times

The early church learned quickly that their prayer had to be continuous because spiritual warfare is continuous. It became their first priority because Satan sought their defeat as his first priority. Thus, their earliest recorded administrative decision after Pentecost (Acts 6) places the ministry of prayer (with the Word) as highest in importance. [20]

Lessons from the Old Testament battles

Four of the greatest victories in the OT required little or no fighting on the part of Israel:

1. The destruction of the Egyptian army after the Red Sea crossing when the waters returned, drowning all who pursued them. (“I will sin unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously –the horse and rider thrown into the sea.”)
2. The fall of Jericho’s walls-after the Israelites marched around the city for seven days. (“Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls came a-tumblin’ down.”)
3. The defeat of the Midianites by Gideon’s band of 300 –lamps, pitchers, and trumpets threw them into confusion.
4. Jehoshaphat’s army –marched out with the choir in front of the army, singing praises.

Lesson: Sometimes we simply need to “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” (2 Chron. 20:17)

Passage	Battle	Concepts
Gen. 14	Abraham rescues Lot	A small group defeated an entire army with God’s help.
Ex. 14	Passover/Red Sea crossing	God will fight for His people. Look for His provision.
Ex. 17: 8-16	Battle with Amalek	While Joshua fought, Moses interceded, with support from Aaron and Hur.
Num. 14: 39 ff.	Israel defeated by Amalekites	Disobedience caused failure and defeat (and 40 years of wilderness wandering).
Joshua 6	Jericho	We win with divine methods, not human methods.
Joshua 7	Ai –1st attempt	Hidden sin can cause disastrous defeat.
Joshua 8	Ai -2 nd attempt	Deception and ambush. This time God was with them.
Joshua 10	War with five kings in Valley of Aijalon	Miracle led to victory – sun stood still over the valley.
Judges 5	Deborah and Barak vs. Jabin The Canaanite	God gives victory and deliverance as we follow.

Judges 7	Gideon vs. Midianites	Element of surprise. Enemy already afraid of God. Break open the vessels and let light shine.
1 Sam. 4	Aphek – Israel defeated by Philistine army	Israel's priests corrupt and people superstitious. The ark captured.
1 Sam. 17	David and Goliath	God enables victory over giants.
1 Sam. 30	Mt. Gilboa –defeated by Philistines	Saul (disobedient multiple times) and his sons died in the battle.
2 Sam. 18	Civil War- Absalom vs. David	Absalom's rebellion ended as he is killed in the forest.
1 Kings 22	Israel vs. Syria (Aram)	King Ahab killed in battle as prophesied.
2 Kings 7	Syria's siege against Judah	Siege ended as Syrians heard sounds of chariots and fled.
2 Kings 19	Assyria vs. Judah	After Hezekiah's prayer, God struck the army of Assyria.
2 Kings 24	Siege and capture of Jerusalem by Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar's army invaded Judah as judgment.
2 Chron. 20	Jehoshaphat's army vs. Ammonites and Moabites	Judah's army led by the musicians. Praise defeats God's enemies.

Principles of military warfare (COOFME)

In classical warfare theory soldiers were taught these “principles of warfare,” based in part on the writings of Carl von Clausewitz:

- Concentration of force
- Objective
- Offensive
- Flexibility
- Mobility
- Economy of force (Simplicity)

Other presentations included

- Security
- Surprise
- Communication

- Cooperation (Unity of Force)

Clearly the Enemy uses these principles in attacks against us-

- The strength of lies temptations can feel overwhelming.
- There is a clear objective- to get God's people to sin or to leave the battlefield.
- Two attacks are seldom identical.
- We seldom know where an attack is coming from.

Would it make sense to consider these same principles to help us to stand in warfare?

In the study of warfare, great men have concluded that there are some overriding principles which, if followed, will always tend toward success in battle, and if neglected or ignored, will tend toward defeat or even destruction. These principles have been entitled the "principles of war."

But not all warfare is waged on a battlefield: every Christian is called to be a soldier. Our fight is against Satan, our objective is the acknowledgment and fulfillment of God's commands, and our ammunition is the power of the Holy Spirit. [21]

From World War Two we learn five principles, effective in human warfare, which can strengthen us in spiritual warfare: [22]

1. Keep an offensive mentality.
2. Press through the attack.
3. Return to effective weapons.
4. Be sober-minded and under authority.
5. Mount a coordinated attack.

Concentration of Force: Military commanders often use a concentration of force to overwhelm the enemy's defenses at a certain point and cut off their supply lines. As the early church grew, the Apostles chose deacons so they themselves could concentrate on the word of God and prayer. (Acts 6) Paul said, "This one thing I do" (Phil 3:13). You must know your objectives, establish your priorities, and make bold, strategic decisions. Then you have to throw all your effort into that initiative. [23]

Objective: The greatest incentive for economizing is to know where you are going and then go there.

The primary objective was "all nations." Jerusalem was the place where power was to be received and from which the early believers were to start after they had received the power. However, they stayed in Jerusalem a prolonged period of time after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Their failure to move out was disobedience to orders. But God finally forced them to leave by allowing persecution. Concentration in the wrong place is not economy of force.

When these principles are combined with an offensive at a decisive point, we are practicing economy of force. In biblical history the greatest example of these principles combined in one military battle is Gideon's victory over the armies of Midian and Amalek described in Judges 7

and 8. In his God-directed use of economy of force, Gideon sent 31,700 men home and won the battle with 300 men. [24]

Conclusions

When it comes to the battles of the Christian life, we have no choice about being involved, since there is an enemy who hates God and hates our guts. The great news is that Jesus has already totally defeated Him. “No weapon that’s fashioned against you will stand. The battle belongs to the Lord.”

Victory is ours. The “wrestling,” however is real. It is close combat, but do not despair. Christ is King! He is Lord of the universe, stronger than any foe. He is triumphant and desires to share that triumph with you. [25]

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