
CHAPTER 10 : SPIRITUAL WARFARE

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

(Eph 6:12)

A. Introduction

The reality of spiritual warfare is attested to by both Scripture and the testimonies of many individuals. Scripture speaks of “good” and “evil” (Mt 5:45, Jn 3:20) of two opposing “kingdoms” (Mk 4:26-30, Lk 11:18) and of agents for good and evil, “battling” against each other: that is, God and Satan (Job 1-2), angels and demons (Rev 12:7, Da 10) and also “sons of the kingdom” and “sons of the evil one” (Mt 13:38, 1Jn 3:2, 1Jn 3:7-10).

The Bible is full of the language of war, such as battle, fight, struggle, strive, resist, attack, enemy, armour, soldiers, advance, oppose and confront. The warfare is real. However, it is not material but spiritual: forces of evil and evil philosophies.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:12)

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” (2Co 10:4)

Jesus’ words and experience also attest to the reality of spiritual warfare. He often spoke about it and he experienced/engaged in it. He was tempted by the devil (Mt 4, Mk 1:12, Lk 4), He was resisted by evil men (Herod and the Roman authorities) and He confronted the kingdom of darkness by casting out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead.

His supreme confrontation was, of course, on the cross and His supreme victory over the forces of evil was demonstrated by His resurrection.

Many individuals, believers and unbelievers, the demonised, the delivered and the delivering, testify to the reality of spiritual powers, whether of good or evil. In fact, it is a hunger for the reality of spiritual power which tempts people to dabble in the occult.

Spiritual warfare originated with the fall of Satan. Satan was an angelic being created by God to guard His throne, a prominent and privileged position. From Eze 28 and Isa 14 we see that Satan had great beauty, splendour and wisdom. However, he fell from his privileged position because of the sin of proud ambition. Not content to be highly exalted, he wanted to be above God and was thrown out of heaven (Eze 28:17, Isa 14:13-14) with possibly a third of the angels, who sinned with him (Rev 12:7-9).

In his humiliation Satan became angry, hateful, bitter and violent (Rev 12:12c). His goal, from that moment till now, is to have revenge on God by:

- Attacking and destroying God's works of creation (man and the universe) and His works of redemption (Israel, Christ and the Church).
- Promoting an alternative world system of which he is the head.
- Gaining glory and worship for himself. He begins his revenge by tempting Adam and Eve with the same sin of proud ambition ("you will be like God," see Ge 3:1-6).

By sinning, man lost his place in Eden and shared with Satan the dominion over the earth he had received from God (Ge 1:28, Lk 4:5-6). Thus we can see how evil was brought to earth by Satan with the co-operation of man.

God's response to this first act of revenge was to proclaim immediately Satan's ultimate destruction (Ge 3:15) and to begin immediately His great plan of redemption, first through Israel, then through Jesus and the Church.

Before we look at the nature of the warfare in which the church is involved, it is important to understand the extent of that warfare and to know that the enemy is limited in time, space, deed and power. Satan and his demons are limited in time because their final destiny (absolute defeat) is definite. When Jesus returns, the judgement spoken by God in Genesis will be put into effect (Mt 8:29, Rev 12:10-12, Rev 20:10, Rev 21:4-8, Rev 22:15). Demonic powers are limited in space. They are created, not divine and are therefore not omnipresent. They are limited in deed. In the book of Job we see that God limits what Satan can do to His servant (Job 1:12, Job 2:6). They are limited in power:

- Satan is not co-equal with God.
- Fallen angels are outnumbered (only one third fell with Satan).
- The enemy's power was severely reduced with Christ's incarnation and resurrection (they were "cast out," "bound" and "disarmed" according to Mt 4:23-24, Lk 4:38-41, Col 2:15, 1Jn 3:8b, and Rev 1:18).
- Jesus gives believers power and authority to do the same.
- Jesus, through His death and resurrection, has bound the strong man and we can now rob him of his possessions (Mk 3:27, Mt 12:29). We are involved in "mopping up operations." (See Mk 6:7-13, Lk 10:17-19, Mk 16:17-20, Ro 16:20 and 1Jn 4:4).

Note that the book of Revelation is clear: God is not "battling." This is not a struggle for God, but rather a meticulously planned strategy of salvation towards the goal of complete freedom from sin and the causes of sin (temptation)⁸. Satan musters up all his energies for war, and God judges him in an instant.

B. The Warfare

The enemy will do everything in his power to destroy the Church. He tries to do this in two ways.

See Mt 13:41 and 2Pe 1:4. Note how, in the church, we go out of our way to prevent even the possibility of sin. See Mt 18:6-9, Ro 14:20-21, 1Co 8:13 and 1Co 10:32.

B.1. He Destroys Believers Himself

Satan destroys us through robbery. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (Jn 10:10) This includes disease, death (wars, abortion, crime, disasters and evil rule) and destruction (property, finances, relationships and family).

It is possible for Christians to be demonised, that is, to be hindered and influenced by demonic forces in an ongoing way until released from their power. The enemy gains access to our lives in three ways:

- When we give him access (a foothold becomes a stronghold). This may be through sustained sin of which we do not repent (including sexual immorality, pornography, gambling, drunkenness, anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, manipulation, domination and love of money). We can also give the enemy access through involvement in the occult (including ouija boards, tarot cards, fortune-tellers, chrystology, alternative medicines (such as reflexology), martial arts, yoga, cults, eastern religions, ancestor worship, divination, spiritualism, black and white witchcraft and Satanism). See Ac 5:3, Eph 4:27 and Jas 4:1-10 where the context is carnality giving the devil access.
- Through generation curses: demonic strongholds can sometimes be passed down to second and third generations. (Our experience shows that Freemasonry can cause women to battle with gynaecological difficulties such as severe menstrual pain, complicated births or barrenness.) Examples include alcoholism, immorality, divorce, manipulation, suicide, physical and sexual abuse. See Ex 20:5 and Ex 34:7. See also Hos 4:12-13 where Scripture talks of a “spirit of prostitution” and “therefore your daughters turn to prostitution.”
- Through traumatic experiences, such as rejection, divorce, murder, rape, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. See Jn 10:10 and 1Pe 5:8-9. The way we deal with these is usually deliverance. However, be careful of having a neurotic attitude to difficulties and issues in your life: the cause may not be demonisation but simply immaturity, weakness of character, the sinful nature or unrenewed thinking. If the cause is demonic it will usually become obvious to others.

The following action can be sufficient to cut off an individual from the influence of demonic powers:

- Repent (confess, completely turn away from sin and go in the opposite direction). See Jas 4:1-10.
- Renounce (this includes destroying any artefacts connected to the sin, occult practice, curse or trauma). See Ac 19:17-20.
- Receive the Holy Spirit (for complete healing, restoration and wholeness). See Jn 4:4.
- Resist the devil. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (Jas 4:7-8a)
- Continue to walk in righteousness and freedom.

B.2. He Gets Us To Destroy Ourselves

- Temptation: In Lk 4 we can identify at least three ways in which the enemy tempts us. First, testing God, that is, pride (Lk 4:9-12), second, lust of the flesh (Lk 4:3-4, Ge 3:6) and third, corrupting the means to get the end (Lk 4:5-8) (for example, money by fraud, getting your spouse’s co-operation by manipulation or domination, gaining success by cutting corners or by cheating, gaining position by promoting yourself or grasping for leadership rather than serving and waiting for God’s promotion). The way we resist temptation is through self-control (Gal 5:22-23, 2Pe 1:5-7, 1Co 7:5) and vulnerability. It is the hidden areas of our lives which keep us in bondage.

Our armour against the attack of the enemy is the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14): we are declared holy through faith in Christ’s atoning death on the cross and we are being made holy by the work of the Holy Spirit in us (1Co 1:2, Col 1:22, Ro 12:1). Also, in fighting temptation we need not despair “for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:15-16).

- Accusation (Rev 12:10, Zec 3:1): “Satan” in Hebrew means “accuser.” Satan brings false accusations (lies, see Jn 8:44) or he comes and accuses us about past sins and failures. The way we reject accusation is through the word of God, that is, Scripture and prophecy (1Ti 1:18-19). Our armour is the belt of truth (Eph 6:14).

- Deception (2Co 4:4, Ge 3:4-13, Gal 3:1): We overcome deception in unbelievers by preaching the gospel and praying for revelation (2Co 10:4-5). We prevent deception in believers by being devoted to doctrine and fellowship (Ac 2:42, 1Ti 4:13-16). Our armour against deception is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17).
- Doubt (Ge 3:1, Mk 4:15, Jas 1:6-8): We resist doubt with faith (Jn 20:27-29, Mt 17:20, Mk 11:22, 1Co 16:13, 2Co 16:13, 2Co 5:7). Our faith needs to increase (2Co 10:15, 2Th 1:3) How does it grow? "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."(Ro 10:17)
- Our armour against doubt is the shield of faith (Eph 6:16). A shield is useless unless lifted up and placed in a protective position: we need to activate our faith.
- Discouragement: Discouragement often follows after accusation, doubt and unresolved difficulties (Ps 42:3, Ps 42:9-10, Ps 77:7-9, La 3:19-20). We overcome it with praise. We worship God, we take our eyes off the difficulties and focus on the greatness and faithfulness of God, we stop listening to accusations and wallowing in doubt and begin to remind ourselves of God's word, that is, the Truth (Ps 42:5-6, Ps 77:10-15, La 3:21-24, Isa 61:3) as we clothe ourselves with praise we conquer despair. Another way we combat discouragement is with prophecy (1Co 14:3): the word of God encourages! Our armour here is, therefore, the belt of truth (praise brings us back to the truth about God and His promises) and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God (Eph 6:14,17)
- Rebellion: Rebellion is independence from God: doing things our way instead of His way, refusing to believe or obey God's word, resisting God's pattern (see, for example, the story of Saul's rebellion in 1Sa 15, especially 1Sa 15:22-23). Independence from God is in fact co-operation with the devil (1Sa 15:23, Dt 18:10) who was the first rebel and he seeks to sow rebellion in both believers and unbelievers. We warfare against rebellion with humility (acknowledging who we really are, see Php 2:3-8 and Isa 14:14: Satan's ambition) and submission to the Lordship of Christ (obedience, see Heb 12:9 and Jas 4:6-7). We also need to submit to one another, especially to those placed in authority over us by God (Ro 13:1-5, Heb 13:17, 1Pe 2:18, Eph 5:21, Col 3:18, 1Pe 5:5-6).

C. Prayer And Fasting

However, there is another kind of warfare in which we engage. It is like sending in the airforce to destroy the enemy's air cover and to provide the army with protection as we begin to advance into enemy territory. This is the warfare of prayer and fasting. See Da 10:2-14 and Da 10:20.

As we pray and ask God to send His angels to war in the heavenlies against demonic principalities and powers, our ability to advance into enemy territory with protection and penetration is secured. It is important to remember that our mandate is to take the land:

It is no good simply praying for God's kingdom to be advanced and then never getting on with the job.

“The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”
(Rev 8:4-5)

D. Conclusion

The mandate of the Church is to extend the kingdom of God. This we do by making disciples of nations, preaching the gospel, binding up the broken-hearted, setting the captives free, feeding and clothing the poor, loving our enemies, becoming peacemakers and defending the oppressed. In doing this we will be resisted by the enemy and we therefore wage spiritual warfare against him.

Put another way, we are the army of God commissioned and equipped by Him to take possession of the land of the enemy. In order to do this we need to be fit soldiers, for which we engage in personal warfare as described above.

Finally, as we wage spiritual warfare we need to remember God's hugeness, His great strength, His complete power, His awesome authority and we need to remember Christ's saying that the gates of Hades will not overcome the Church (Mt 16:18). Therefore, we can wage warfare with confidence and the assurance of victory.