



Spiritual Warfare

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

DAVID POWLISON

(Ephesians 6:10-20)



The Bible makes it clear that all people choose either to follow the one and only God or to follow Satan. To refuse to love God automatically places someone in Satan's camp. But God has chosen to attack and plunder Satan's kingdom in order to deliver us. He captures people for Himself through the powerful love of Jesus (Col. 1:13). God is on the offensive in spiritual warfare, and we join His fight.

But the enemy fights back, so believers must be alert and courageous. The outcome is certain—light will defeat darkness—but the battle still rages. The Bible repeatedly calls believers to stand up to Satan: "Stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); "resist the devil" (James 4:7). God promises that the devil will flee, will be crushed underfoot, and that we will stand victorious. The Bible teaches in detail how to fight against Satan with truth, faith, repentance, prayer, love, and obedience in the power of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, some in the church have come to think that involvement in spiritual warfare is mainly about the problem of being possessed by demons. The Bible makes clear, however, that *all believers* face spiritual warfare. The Bible never mentions exorcism of demons in the context of fighting the deepest spiritual battle.

Ephesians 6:10-20 offers specific instruction about how to fight spiritual warfare.

WEARING THE ARMOR

The armor *is* the Lord, who Himself invades the world of darkness and evil. The Old Testament provides pictures of each of the different weapons of war that God-in-Christ wears: the belt of faithfulness (Is. 11:5), the breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation (Is. 59:17), the feet bringing good news (Is. 52:7), the sword of the Word (Is. 49:2). The Lord is also the

shield behind which faith takes refuge (Ps. 18:2). So God is the attacker and invader in spiritual warfare. He first wears His own weapons.

We put on God and His power. We put on this armor of light, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:12, 14). The entire Book of Ephesians demonstrates how Paul as a man in Christ invades the world of darkness with the light of the message of Jesus. He calls believers to put on the same armor for the ongoing spiritual warfare that we all face. He does not speak of "demon deliverance."

FIGHTING THE REAL BATTLE

"Demon deliverance" in the sphere of counseling, evangelism, and sanctification is a fairly recent phenomenon. This "deliverance" focus believes that spiritual warfare involves grappling with resident demons that hold people in bondage to patterns of sin. Becoming indwelt by demons is believed to occur as an inheritance from evil ancestors, from persisting in sin, from being sinned against, or through owning evil objects. Freedom (deliverance) is thought to come from casting the demons out. Scripture consistently undermines this view, however. Demon deliverance is not a biblical understanding of spiritual warfare for five main reasons.

First, it grants too much freedom and initiative to Satan, and portrays our warfare as largely on the defensive. Satan's malicious activities operate under God's

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sovereign control and purposes. For example, Satan's affliction of Job and the evil spirit's torment of Saul occurred only with God's permission. The devil's malice toward God and His people was a tool of God's greater purposes: to humiliate Satan, to grow Job's faith, to destroy Saul.

Second, the exorcisms Jesus performed never intended to address moral bondage and confusion. The driving out of demons is not even about spiritual warfare, *per se*. The struggles of spiritual warfare—sins, unbelief, idolatry, confusion, and moral struggles—are never cast out. Those from whom Jesus drove demons primarily had symptoms of physical suffering. Jesus' approach to afflicting spirits lacked the hysteria and animistic worldview embodied in contemporary "demon deliverance."

Third, when Jesus and the apostles dealt with sin, occult practices, temptation, and moral bondage, they always spoke and fought in the Ephesians 6 manner—using relevant truth, living faith, repentance, and pointed prayer. Satan's attempts to rule people's lives through falsehood, deceit, intimidation, and temptation are never "cast out." Both in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus displayed true spiritual warfare by holding onto truth.

Fourth, people who come out of an occult background would seem to be a strong argument for some type of deliverance. The Bible, however, frequently talks about such people and never portrays exorcism as the solution to their problems. Simon the sorcerer is a prime example (Acts 8). When he showed patterns of power lust, Peter used moral bondage language and not demonic bondage language. Exorcism did not appear to be Peter's concern in addressing Simon's condition.

Finally, the devil works on the inside, appealing to and ruling people's hearts. Exactly how he does this is a mystery; that he does this is a given. The human heart

is by nature "full of evil" (Eccl. 9:3), so it is no surprise to find an intimate congruence between humans and the evil one. God's method for helping such people is amazingly normal and straightforward: repentance of sinful tendencies so that they can be cleansed and renewed.

Spiritual warfare is part of every Christian's daily life. We triumph as we walk by faith in Christ, who turns us from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, forgiving sin, and giving us a place among those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18).

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of spiritual warfare include:

- > Matthew 4:1-11
- > Ephesians 2:2
- > James 4:7-10
- > 1 John 4:1-6
- > 2 John 7-11

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note about spiritual warfare at Ephesians 6:10-20 on page 1558. See also the personality profile of Michael the archangel on page 1708.

⁴And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

BONDSERVANTS AND MASTERS

⁵Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to

Christ; ⁶not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is a slave or free.*

⁹And you, masters, do the same things to



Fatherhood

KEY PASSAGE

DEAR OLD DAD

(6:4)

Paul here addressed just fathers, but obviously, mothers can use this same advice. Fathers are responsible for their children, to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” All fathers should be working toward the goal of raising God-honoring children. Because all fathers are different, with varying backgrounds, personalities, and ideas, they will do this in many different ways. Yet they ought to be careful in their training and discipline not to provoke their children “to wrath.” In other words, sometimes a father’s discipline can be overly harsh, unfair, unloving, or irresponsible, causing children to become angered, discouraged, and resentful. A father who disciplines fairly, consistently, and lovingly is raising his children well. Dads also have the huge responsibility of modeling to their children what their heavenly Father is like. What an incredible opportunity and responsibility!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about fatherhood on pages 516, 517. See also the personal-profile of the prodigal son’s father on page 1348.



Spiritual Warfare

KEY PASSAGE

THE WINNING TEAM

(6:10-20)

The spiritual realm has two sides—God’s side and Satan’s side. Those who have accepted Christ as Savior are on God’s side; that automatically makes them enemies of Satan. This passage says that our battle is against “the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” These forces are real and powerful and should not be underestimated. Their goal is to make believers ineffective for God’s kingdom and to keep unbelievers away from God.

The battle rages constantly, usually beyond our earthly vision. At times, however, we see it clearly when we face temptation, difficulty, and trials. Evil knows our weaknesses; Satan knows where to attack. Our strength for the battle is in God. We need to “suit up” with God’s armor so that we can be ready when Satan attacks. Wearing God’s armor, we fight our daily battles, trusting God to fight with us through His Holy Spirit. The war has already been won, and we are on the winning side!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about spiritual warfare on pages 1560, 1561. See also the personality profile of Michael the archangel on page 1708.

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SATAN THROWN OUT OF HEAVEN

⁷And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them^a in heaven any longer. ⁹So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. ¹¹And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. ¹²Therefore

rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

THE WOMAN PERSECUTED

¹³Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. ¹⁴But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried

12:8 ^aM-Text reads *him*.

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Spiritual Warfare

MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

(REVELATION 12:7-12)

The Book of Revelation not only offers a long view of God's plan in history; it also offers a deeper view of reality. For those who are tempted to think that reality ends with our senses, Revelation reminds us that the spiritual dimension dwarfs our own. The conflict rages, and the battles sometimes occur here on earth, in human lives. Parts of God's amazing creation have rebelled, and the battle lines can even divide a human heart.

Revelation 12 describes the two armies in this battle: On God's side are all of His angels (such as Michael, mentioned here), and all of God's people; on the other side are Satan, his demons, and all who do not believe in Christ as Savior. As violent as the spiritual and physical battles may be, the outcome of the war has already been decided. The victory was assured in the sacrificial death of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

This passage also reminds us that in spiritual warfare, as in physical warfare, even the winning side often suffers casualties. History is filled with examples of Christians who have laid down their lives or been martyred for the cause of Christ. From the perspective of eternity and heaven, they are victors. As John described them, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11). These are believers who, in the very act of dying, have won the battle. They understand that believers who have a firm hold on the reality of eternal life will not hold on to physical life at all costs.

Meanwhile, as long as this life lasts, Christians are involved as active participants in spiritual warfare. We are called to be faithful, and we are instructed to live the life of one who serves a Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are invited to place our lives at His disposal, available to be used anytime, anywhere, to encourage each other along the way, and to pray always for our fellow soldiers in Christ.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about spiritual warfare on pages 1560, 1561. See also the key passage note at Ephesians 6:10-20 on page 1558.

And their houses will be full of owls;
Ostriches will dwell there,
And wild goats will caper there.

22 The hyenas will howl in their citadels,
And jackals in their pleasant palaces.
Her time is near to come,
And her days will not be prolonged."

MERCY ON JACOB

14 For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land. The strangers will be joined with them, and they will cling to the house of Jacob. ²Then people will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them for servants and maids in the land of the LORD; they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors.

FALL OF THE KING OF BABYLON

³It shall come to pass in the day the LORD gives you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve, ⁴that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say:

"How the oppressor has ceased,
The golden^a city ceased!
The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked,
The scepter of the rulers;
He who struck the people in wrath with a continual stroke,
He who ruled the nations in anger,
Is persecuted *and* no one hinders.
The whole earth is at rest *and* quiet;
They break forth into singing.

⁸ Indeed the cypress trees rejoice over you,
And the cedars of Lebanon,

Saying, 'Since you were cut down,
No woodsman has come up against us.'

⁹ "Hell from beneath is excited about you,
To meet *you* at your coming;
It stirs up the dead for you,
All the chief ones of the earth;
It has raised up from their thrones
All the kings of the nations.
¹⁰ They all shall speak and say to you:
'Have you also become as weak as we?
Have you become like us?
¹¹ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
And the sound of your stringed instruments;
The maggot is spread under you,
And worms cover you.'

THE FALL OF LUCIFER

¹² "How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer," son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
¹³ For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'
¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.

¹⁶ "Those who see you will gaze at you,
And consider you, *saying*:

14:4 ^aOr *insolent* 14:12 ^aLiterally *Day Star*

SOUL NOTE



The Winning Team (14:12-15) Although Isaiah's message was directed against the king of Babylon, many believe the imagery parallels the fall of Satan. The Evil One may have power on earth for a brief time, but God's judgment upon him has already been determined. Satan started as a great angel, and fell from his lofty position in heaven because of his pride. He sought to "be like the Most High," but God said he "shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit" (14:14, 15). As we fight battles against evil, we must remember that the war has already been won.

Topic: Spiritual Warfare

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⁵⁵But He turned and rebuked them,^a and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save *them*.”^a And they went to another village.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

⁵⁷Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”

⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head.”

⁵⁹Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house.”

⁶²But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

THE SEVENTY SENT OUT

10 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also,^a and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. ²Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. ⁵But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ ⁶And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. ⁷And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the

laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. ⁹And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘The very dust of your city which clings to us^a we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ ¹²But^a I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.

WOE TO THE IMPENITENT CITIES

¹³“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades.^a ¹⁶He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”

THE SEVENTY RETURN WITH JOY

¹⁷Then the seventy^a returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”

¹⁸And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the

9:55 ^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

9:56 ^aNU-Text omits the first sentence of this verse.

10:1 ^aNU-Text reads *seventy-two others*.

10:11 ^aNU-Text reads *our feet*. **10:12** ^aNU-Text and M-Text omit *But*. **10:15** ^aNU-Text reads *will you be exalted to heaven? You will be thrust down to Hades!* **10:17** ^aNU-Text reads *seventy-two*.

SOUL NOTE



Raging (10:17-19) Since sin entered the world, wars have been fought for a wide variety of reasons. But continuous war must be fought by believers. This is the constant struggle between good and evil as Satan tries to rule our lives. Jesus has already defeated Satan and has won this battle through His death and resurrection. Even though the battle continues, we can be assured that, with Jesus’ help, the important victory—eternal life—is already ours. **Topic: Spiritual Warfare**

Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.^a On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.^a

¹⁷For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸Now

"If the righteous one is scarcely saved,

Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"^a

¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

SHEPHERD THE FLOCK

5 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but

4:14 ^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

4:16 ^aNU-Text reads *name*. 4:18 ^aProverbs 11:31

KEY PASSAGE



Discouragement

GIVE IT TO GOD

(5:7)

Discouragement often occurs when people shoulder their own worries, cares, and fears, and then begin to collapse under the weight. Discouragement is not a godly attitude because it reveals an unwillingness to trust God. Discouragement can be dealt a death blow, however, when we constantly cast all our cares upon God, because He cares for us.

Casting our cares on God takes a great amount of trust and humility. We need to give Him all of our cares—not just the ones we think are big enough or important enough. God will even shoulder the cares that we have brought upon ourselves—we can give them *all* to Him. His shoulders are big enough to carry all of our fears, worries, and troubles. When we give our cares to God, we can brush off our discouragement and get back to work. We have much to do for God!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about discouragement on pages 266, 267. See also the personality profile of Nehemiah on page 605.

SOUL NOTE



Steadfast (5:8–10) The moment a person becomes a Christian, Satan tries to make them ineffective through sin or through struggles with discouragement or suffering. Believers must be sober and vigilant, resisting Satan by remaining “steadfast in the faith.” This is a strong defensive action. Satan is a defeated enemy, so believers need not fear him. When we resist Satan, he will flee (James 4:7). We resist Satan through maintaining our steadfast faith in Christ, wearing the armor that God provides (Eph. 6:10–20), and remembering that we are not alone in our suffering. The same sufferings are being experienced by believers everywhere. Through these sufferings, He will “establish, strengthen, and settle” His people. **Topic: Spiritual Warfare**