

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Scripture are from the New King James Version.
- I often type words in capitals for emphasis. You will notice it occurring in the expression of my thoughts AND in quotations.
- All my comments and opinions are given from my viewpoint as a Christian who believes that the text of the Holy Bible, as originally given, is the Word of God. My opinions are based on my understanding of God's opinion as expressed in the Bible and I offer them with good intention without any will to cause offense to anyone holding a different opinion. They are offered in the hope of shedding light and providing help to anyone open to receive it.
- The text of this booklet would be too lengthy if I typed out in full every Scripture referred to, but you will miss much of the message if you do not turn to, and read, each of the Scriptures concerned.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

INTRODUCTION

The first point I should make clear is that spiritual warfare has nothing whatsoever to do with what the world thinks of in terms of conventional warfare. Jesus said, shortly before He was crucified, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here". (John 18.36) Secular historians have wrongly connected Christianity with wars and crusades because nominally Christian countries and organisations have been involved in conventional wars. Scripture makes it clear that, as far as true Christianity is concerned, "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God," (2 Corinthians 10. 3-5).

True, Biblical Christians know that the Kingdom we proclaim is an eternal Kingdom. We are not foolish enough to believe that it can be established by going to war in the conventional sense nor can anyone be forced into it at the point of a gun or the blade of a sword.

Having said this, let us turn to the Scriptures of truth.

Read: Ephesians 6. 10-20

In light of what this passage tells us we need to be on our guard continually if we are to lead useful lives in the Lord's service. In this study we will focus our attention on three things:

- (i) KNOWING YOUR ENEMY – AND DEFEATING HIM
- (ii) KNOWING YOUR WEAKNESSES – AND ADDRESSING THEM
- (iii) KNOWING YOUR RESOURCES – AND USING THEM

Jesus told an interesting parable in Matthew 13.24-30. The disciples did not understand it so Jesus explained its meaning and message (see verses 36-43 of the same chapter). The parable has three parties (the "man", "his enemy" and "the servants") and they each represent three levels of power :

- "the man" is Jesus (v.37) and He has DIVINE POWER
- "His enemy" is the devil (v.39) and he has SUPERNATURAL POWER
- "the servants" are us (vs.27-28) and we have NATURAL POWER

The Lord is building His church and Satan is being as disruptive as he can, but God has His plans. Judgement will come at His appointed time and God's people will enter the eternal kingdom.

God has given us an amazing amount of information about the future. We have no doubt about who will ultimately be victorious. John says clearly in his first epistle, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3.8). This He will most assuredly do. In the interim we, as God's servants, face opposition we receive from the world, with its natural power, and the devil (and his helpers) with their supernatural power. However, we do so in full assurance that we have adequate resources supplied to us by a loving and gracious God Who has divine power.

Spiritual warfare directs our attention to the opposition we face from our enemy, the devil, with his supernatural power.

(i) KNOWING YOUR ENEMY - AND DEFEATING HIM

As we saw in the parable we referred to above, the devil is the "enemy" of God (Matthew 13.39). It should not surprise us to learn that he is also the enemy of the followers of God. Peter warns us to, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5.8)

The analogy of the roaring lion is apt. The lion roars and the prey panics and runs. If we panic and run we might stumble in a way that makes us easy for the devil to catch. The more we know about his tactics the better prepared we are to react in a way that defeats his purposes. Paul, in advising the believers how to react to a matter troubling their church demonstrated that we can know Satan's tactics and out-manoeuvre him. He said, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for WE ARE NOT IGNORANT OF HIS DEVICES" (2 Corinthians 2.11).

Peter tells us that we CAN resist the devil and as he does so he assures us that the attacks we receive from Satan are being experienced by believers all over the world (resist the devil, he says, "steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" – 1 Peter 5.8). James gives us great encouragement when he says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" James 4.7). Everything is in our favour if we diligently grow to maturity (2 Peter 1.1-11) so it is not surprising that Peter ends his second epistle by exhorting us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3.18).

Lets us examine some of the information Scripture gives us about Satan:

- Ezekiel 28.12-15 tells us some things about HIS ORIGIN : (As I understand it the first part of v.12 refers to "the king of Tyre" who was influenced by Satan, but the remainder of this portion of Scripture refers to Satan himself) He was CREATED (v. 13 and v.15). This, of-course, is no surprise to us for God created EVERYTHING and EVERYTHING EXCEPT GOD was created. The interesting thing is that he was "the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (v.12). He was created to occupy a very important position (v.14) and it would appear he had a great deal of freedom to move about in heavenly realms for it says he "walked back and forth" (v.14). There is also an indication that he was gifted musically for verse 13 makes reference to the "workmanship" of his "pipes and timbrels". Verse 15 is significant, and may give us a clue as to THE ORIGIN OF SIN. It says, "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you". As far as I know

there is no reference in Scripture to “iniquity” prior to Satan’s sin in seeking to exalt himself beyond his station. The fact that he was perfect in his ways before his rebellion shows he initially fulfilled his God-given role acceptably.

- Other verses in Ezekiel 28, combined with verses elsewhere in Scripture, help us to understand something of his activities before his rebellion, the nature of his sin and the judgement he brought upon himself because of it. Verses 16-17 tell us that he was busy and that changes “within” him caused him to sin. Pride motivated him (“your heart was lifted up because of your beauty” – v.17). He corrupted his wisdom and God cast him down from his exalted position. The latter part of verse 17 appears to return to talking about the king of Tyre.
- Isaiah 14 is similar to Ezekiel 28 in that the early part of the chapter talks about one of Satan’s proteges, the king of Babylon, then moves from him to talk about Satan himself, then returns to complete the pronouncements about Babylon’s king. In verses 12-15 the fall of Satan is the theme and we have confirmation that rebellion, fuelled by pride moved God to judge him. The desires of his heart led him to say, “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most high” (vs. 13-14).
- We can then turn to Scriptures that reveal HIS TACTICS. When we see what caused Satan to fall it is not surprising that, when he got the opportunity to tempt Adam and Eve, he used the temptation that brought him down to bring them down too. His approach to our first parents is recorded in Genesis 3.1-7. He came to them casting doubt on the Word of God. “Has God indeed said?” he begins (v.1), then he follows it up with outright contradiction of what God said by saying, “You will not surely die” (v.4). This laid the ground for him to tempt them with self-exaltation and promotion as he tells Eve, “in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (v.5). How similar that was to the temptation that led to his own downfall. This tactic of casting doubt on the Word of God is combined with a deliberate misuse of the Word of God. A clear example of this occurred during his temptation of the Lord in the wilderness (Luke 4.9-12). Satan quoted Psalm 91.11-12 but tried to use it in a way it was not intended to be used. He challenged Jesus to use it as a means of testing God the Father as to whether or not He would do what He promised. Jesus rejects the challenge and quotes Deuteronomy 6.16, exposing Satan’s misuse of Scripture. We need to be familiar with Scripture, and the correct application of it, to be able to rebuff the devil when he uses the same tactic with us.
- We have an array of Scriptures that reveal Satan’s NATURE and his ABILITIES. Job 1.6-11 lets us know that he has the freedom to move about the earth observing what individuals are doing. John 8.44 tells us that he is a MURDERER and a LIAR. Matthew 8.28-29 and Revelation 12.12 let us know that he (and his demonic helpers) HAVE SOME KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE and they stake their claims and plan their actions accordingly. 1Peter 5.8 reveals his FEROCITY. ZECHARIAH 3.1 and Revelation 12.10 tell us that he is an ACCUSER. Revelation 12.13 reveal him as a PERSECUTER. Acts 5. 1-11 shows us his ability to GET INTO THE CHURCHES and INFLUENCE ITS MEMBERS. We have no shortage of information about him.

The important thing is to USE THIS KNOWLEDGE TO DEFEAT HIM. We will look at this in some detail under (iii).

(ii) KNOWING YOUR WEAKNESSES - AND ADDRESSING THEM

We have used the Scriptures to gain knowledge about Satan. Let us now do the same thing to gain knowledge of our weaknesses. It is insufficient for us to examine ourselves without reference to the Scriptures, for God knows more about us than we do, and we would tend to dismiss some of our weaknesses as being of little or no consequence.

As a result of our inherited fallen nature we have major problems. Each and every one of us has a heart that is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17.9). This same verse tells us that we are unaware of the depths of its wickedness but Jesus gave us a fair picture of what we are capable of stooping to when He said, “from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness”. That being the case, Satan has a wide range of areas on which to tempt us to do the wrong thing.

Paul and Barnabas were mature Christians whom we would hold up as being examples to follow, but it did not prevent them from having a major disagreement that caused them to go in different directions (Acts 15.36-41). Peter was a pillar of the church, but it did not save him from being hypocritical through fear of legalistic Jews (Galatians 2.11-16).

We could fill pages with Scripture references to mistakes men and women of God have made. Some time ago I did a study of outstanding followers of God who failed in the very area in which they were strongest, like:

- Noah – who was renowned for his righteousness (Genesis 6.9 and Ezekiel 14.13-14), but let himself down when he got drunk (Genesis 9.20-27)
- Moses – who was the most humble man on earth at that time (Numbers 12.3), but failed when he lost his temper (Numbers 20.1-12)
- Solomon – who was the wisest man on earth in his day (1 Kings 4.29-31), but became a fool in his latter years (1 Kings 11.1-4)

For more information on outstanding men of God who failed on their strongest characteristic refer to my study on “Failings”. Scripture gives us a very direct warning when it says, “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”.

We all have a fair idea of our relative strengths and weaknesses. The wording of Hebrews 12.1 is interesting (“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and THE SIN WHICH SO EASILY ENSNARES US, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”). It may be that “the sin which so easily ensnares us” is a reminder to each of us that we have specific weaknesses we need to be careful about. Young’s Literal Translation refers to “THE CLOSELY BESETTING SIN”. A pastor, for whom I had great respect, had been an alcoholic before he became a Christian. He said he had to avoid the very smell of alcoholic beverages.

God has given us a promise in 1 Corinthians 10.13 regarding temptation, namely, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” This, on the one hand, lets us know that we have no excuse for yielding to temptation, but, on the other hand, lets us know that there is a way of escape. We should search for the way of escape. The next verse (1 Corinthians 10.14) says, “Therefore, my

beloved, flee from idolatry". There are many temptations, like idolatry, that present themselves to us, and the way of escape is to FLEE. An example is the danger of being seduced sexually, and Joseph had the right idea (Genesis 39.7-13).

If you are a worrier the path of escape is prayer (Philippians 4.6-9), but the ability to "cast all your care" on the Lord (1 Peter 5.7) does not come easily. That is one of the reasons the list of things to train your mind to think about is so long (Philippians 4.8). However, perseverance pays off (Ephesians 6.18) and the promises of God are always fulfilled (Isaiah 26.3).

One of the most subtle temptations in the western today is MATERIALISM. We have so much (and in most cases WE HAVE TOO MUCH OF MANY THINGS). Agar was a wise man. He realized that there is danger in having too much and danger in having too little, so he had a prayer ("Give me neither poverty nor riches" – Proverbs 30.8), and I would imagine he prayed it often. Most of us in the developed world will avoid poverty, but we are certainly in danger of becoming materialistic. God warned His people, in Old Testament times, against this danger (Deuteronomy 8.11-20) and the warning is apt for us today.

It may have been a form of materialism that led Ananias and Sapphira to tell lies (Acts 5.1-11). Satan was active in that sad episode (v.3)

One of the main things we need to remember is that when we yield to temptations we have ultimately no one to blame but ourselves. God has promised us a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10.13) and we cannot blame Satan, for God has also promised us that Satan will flee if we resist him (James 4.7). ALL THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE ASSURED TO US IN JESUS (2 Corinthians 1.20) and it is BY THESE PROMISES THAT WE ARE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE (2 Peter 1.4).

(iii) KNOWING YOUR RESOURCES – AND USING THEM

John tells us that, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4.4). Each Person in the Godhead is infinitely more powerful than Satan and, in a remarkable way the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in us (John 14.16-17 and 23). We can say, with Paul, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8.31)

We have constant struggles with our fallen nature (Romans 7.14-23) but we have been promised deliverance through Jesus (v.25). We have been promised that "sin shall not have dominion" over us (Romans 6.14) but the responsibility to "not let sin reign" in our mortal body (Romans 6.14) is squarely placed on our shoulders. God has provided everything we need for the spiritual warfare we face, but it is our responsibility to acquaint ourselves with, and use effectively, the resources made available to us. With this in mind let us look at:

Ephesians 6.10-20

Paul's epistle to the saints in Ephesus has much to teach us about aspects of our salvation and our walk with God. This portion has valuable teaching about our resources for spiritual warfare.

v.10 Tells us to be STRONG “in the power of HIS might”. In that power we are ready for the battle. Jesus said, “without Me you can do nothing” (John 15.5) but Paul had been telling the Ephesians about “the exceeding greatness” of God’s power “toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead” (Ephesians 1.19-20), There is no power greater than the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and that is the very power God makes available to us as we face “the rulers of the darkness of this age”. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth telling them about the trouble that came to him (and those who were with him) in Asia. He said he was “burdened beyond measure, above strength” so that he “despaired even of life”, but he trusted in God, not in himself. He practiced what he preached for he had learned that God HAS delivered, DOES deliver and WILL deliver us in all sorts of circumstances (2 Corinthians 1.8-10).

v.11 Tells us to “put on the WHOLE armour of God”. We dare not leave off any part of it. It has been designed to protect every part of us. The devil is cunning, clever and experienced and he will do damage to any part of us that we leave unprotected.

v.12 Tells us that the enemy is formidable. Satan has a host of helpers. Their power and influence reaches to every part of the world and extends even to “heavenly places”. It is quite staggering to read, in the opening chapters of Job, that Satan attends meetings in heaven (Job 1.6 and 2.1). He does not merely attend as an observer but he makes accusations about people on earth and seeks permission to take action against them (Job 1.7-12 and 2.2-6). When he gets that permission he uses it to the full (Job 1.13-22 and 2.7). You cannot read these verses without being amazed at the possible extent of his interference in our lives. This verse tells us about THE NORMAL EXPERIENCE OF LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. We are continually at war (John 16.33) yet continually at peace (John 14.27)

The following verses (13-18) describe “THE ARMOUR OF GOD”. We can draw lessons from it on TWO LEVELS:

- (i) VISUALLY (or, if you like, PHYSICALLY): The people of Paul’s day were familiar with the type of armour described here. They could visualise it. We know enough about it from history books and samples of it that are still available, or can be seen in museums.
- (ii) SPIRITUALLY: Each piece of armour speaks of something in the spiritual realm.

VISUALLY

v.13 Underscores the necessity of putting on the WHOLE armour of God. Only by being fully protected can we hope to still be standing when the battle is over. As believers, empowered by the Lord, we can confidently obey the exhortation to STAND!

v.14 Mentions two parts of the armour that share a characteristic. Telling the TRUTH involves SAYING THE RIGHT THING and RIGHTEOUSNESS involves DOING THE RIGHT THING. When you SAY and DO the right thing you have nothing to worry about. TRUTH is said to “gird your waist. In doing so it is the only part of the armour that goes right round you. If you tell the truth it will not matter what people say behind your back. Truth stands up to scrutiny.

v.15 Links the “gospel of PEACE” to what you wear on your feet. The footprint we should leave, wherever we go, should be PEACE. We represent the “Prince of PEACE” (Isaiah 9.6), who is the Son of the “God of PEACE” (Philippians 4.9) and Jesus has imparted HIS PEACE to us (John 14.27).

v.16 Lays emphasis on a particular piece of armour. It says, “ABOVE ALL, taking THE SHIELD OF FAITH”. The SHIELD is moveable. You can use it to save yourself from things coming at you from all directions. Paul aptly mentions “all the fiery darts of the wicked one”. We are saved through faith (Ephesians 2.8), we walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5.7) and it is by faith that we serve God (Hebrews 11).

v.17 Our head needs to be protected, so we have the eternal security of Salvation as a HELMET. We are then reminded of A WEAPON OF OFFENSE – THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT which is THE WORD OF GOD . It is essential that, as children of God, we know thoroughly the Word of God.

The importance of knowing the Word of God cannot be overstated. Why would anyone ever enter a battle without their sword? You could accomplish nothing! Without a sword you would be a play-thing for the enemy! Jesus rebuffed every temptation the devil brought against Him by accurate use of THE WORD OF GOD (Luke 4.1-13). It is of limited use to say to someone, “I know it says something about what we are discussing in the Bible, but I do not know where to find it to show you”. When Jesus had something to teach from the Scriptures He knew exactly where it was written and He turned it up, read it out and made the necessary application (Luke 4.16-21). We need to be able to do the same. We need to know and obey the Word of God for our own benefit (James 1.22) and we need to be able to explain the meaning of it to others for their benefit (Acts 8.29-39). We need to take time, and make the necessary effort, to be competent in using the Word of God (2 Timothy 2.15 and 3.16-17). You will discover that Satan knows the Word of God. However, he is such a liar and deceiver that he deliberately mis-quotes or mis-applies it (as is seen in his temptation of Jesus in Luke 4.1-13). He is, as a consequence, using a BENT SWORD, and it becomes a weakness to him.

vs. 19-20 Take us to the subject of PRAYER. Prayer is an amazing resource. It is both a DEFENSIVE and an OFFENSIVE part of our armour. To be in direct contact with the creator and sustainer of all things is beyond evaluation. These verses exhort us to pray continually and about everything. We should seek the leading of God the Spirit as we pray so that our requests mirror the will of God.. Our prayers should be for “all the saints” and Paul’s insertion of “and for me” should remind us of the critical need of praying for ourselves. We should be acutely aware of our own needs and, in this regard, I have noted how specifically many of the saints of the past have prayed for themselves. King David faced many dangers, so we find him praying for deliverance from fear (Psalm 34.4). Agur sensed a weakness in himself for coping with material extremes, so he prayed that he would never experience poverty or riches (Proverbs 30.7-9). Solomon was aware of the responsibilities that had been placed on his shoulders in being anointed king of Israel and he prayed for wisdom (1 Kings 3.5-14). As you become aware of your needs pray for yourself, very specifically, asking God to meet your needs. Our greatest example in all things is the Lord Himself. He prayed for Himself (Hebrews 5.5-7 indicates that it was His habit to do so and Matthew 26. 36-44 is an example of it). If Jesus needed to pray for Himself, we certainly do. Prayer should cover every part of our preparation for the battles of life.

SPIRITUALLY

Our armour consists of OUR SALVATION (v.17) (Colossians 1.13, 2.3 and 2.9-10) and without it you are defenceless (Ephesians 2.12); THE TRUTH (v.14) (John 8.31-32); THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST (v.14) (Philippians 3.7-9); FAITH (v.16) (Galatians 2.20); and THE WORD OF GOD (v.17) (Psalm 119).

97-100 and 165) – ALL brought to us “in the power of God’s might” (v.10) empowering us to carry the greatest message the world has ever heard – “THE GOSPEL OF PEACE” (v.15) (Romans 1.15-16).

These spiritual lessons are much deeper than the visual! Each subject mentioned should be studied in detail to learn everything Scripture teaches about it. Detailed studies of each of these subjects is beyond the scope of this current study.

In rounding off this brief study I will provide several comments that may shed more light on this important subject and may lead you to look in more detail at aspects of it that are of particular interest to you.

- Do not involve yourself more deeply in the supernatural world than the Lord requires of you (Deuteronomy 18.9-14).
- Be aware that the supernatural powers have invaded all parts of the world we live in. This includes the people who inhabit the earth (Ephesians 2.1-3), the places we look to for wisdom, like schools and universities (James 3.13-18) and even our churches (2 Corinthians 11.13-15).
- We only need to think about our heads to identify our main sources of danger, What we think with our MINDS (Mark 7.21-23), see with our EYES (Matthew 6.22-23), hear with our EARS (Exodus 23.13) and what we say with our MOUTHS determine what we will do with our lives.
- Renewal of our MIND is critical to transformation of our LIFE (Romans 12.1-2). Discipline in our thinking is vitally important (Philippians 4.8).
- Jesus spoke extensively about the spiritual realm and the supernatural world (Matthew 12.22-45). The supernatural world touches our natural world (v.22). Satan has a “kingdom” (v.26). Satan is the “strong man” but Jesus can bind him (v.29). The spiritual realm poses the greatest danger to us (vs..31-32). Demons do not give up easily (vs.43-45).
- The devil is busy at present (1 Timothy 4.1-3) but he will become even busier in the near future (Revelation 12.7-12).

Much more could be said on the subject of spiritual warfare but I will close with three brief statements:

- (i) Be informed and be alert! Study the information given to us in the Scriptures and obey the instructions that accompany it.
- (ii) Use only the armour and the weapons for spiritual warfare that God has specifically described in His Word. It is foolish and dangerous invent for yourself supposed powers and protections that are not specifically guaranteed to you.
- (iii) Seek peace in your heart. I have discovered that one of the most reliable ways of discerning whether or not I am doing what the Lord wishes me to do in any matter is when I have the peace of God in my heart as I talk to Him about that matter.

God Bless,

Ray Ewart

