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Spiritual Warfare: A Strategic Guide

Lance T. Beauchamp

Liberty University, lbeauchamps@liberty.edu

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Spiritual Warfare: A Strategic Guide

¹⁰ Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. ¹² For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens (Eph 6:10–12).¹

This is a passage most of us are familiar with and perhaps we have heard a message or two on the armor of God from the following verses in Ephesians 6 but do we take the idea of spiritual warfare seriously or do we gloss over it as if it is purely hypothetical or metaphorical? Most react in one of two ways: 1) They make too much of Satan and see a demon behind every bush or 2) They make too little of Satan, living a life of practical naturalism.

In the first extreme response, every temptation is addressed as “The Devil made me do it.” In reality, even as believers, we are our own worst enemies because of our continued desires for the things of the flesh (Rom 7:15). We cannot blame everything in our lives on demonic influence. Even when temptation comes our way, God has promised that we always have a way out (1 Cor 10:13). While demonic influence indeed does tempt us, we are more often enticed by our own flesh as well as the worldly pleasures that surround us and compete for our attention (Eph 2:1–3).² On the other end of the spectrum, we must be aware that the “spiritual forces of evil” are a reality and we would do well to be vigilant and informed of their power and influence. A balanced approach is not only necessary for proper interpretation and application of biblical truth but also necessary for comprehending life in this world as we know it.

You see, it is imperative that we grasp two essential facts: **1) Satan and his demons are very real. They hate everything about you and want to destroy you.** “Be serious! Be alert!

¹ All translations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

² Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 32.

Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour” (1 Pet 5:8). The reality is that we are at war with a relentless enemy who will exploit our weaknesses in every possible way. Although Satan cannot snatch you from the hand of God (John 10:28; Rom 8:38–39; Php 1:6), he will do whatever he can to render you ineffective in being a tool for God’s purposes. His goal is to take you off the battlefield, out of the game, and onto the sidelines. **2) We serve a sovereign and victorious God who has equipped you with everything you need to have victory over evil.** The good news is that the outcome of the war has already been determined since Jesus paid the penalty of sin for us on the cross and resurrected from the dead (Col 2:15). In the meantime, we are fighting spiritual battles every day but God is with us.

“The story of your life is the story of the long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you could be and fears it...Otherwise, much of the Bible will not make sense to you. Much of your *life* will not make sense to you.”³ How many times have we faced situations in our life and not understood why people acted or reacted in a certain way? While not every situation is evidence of a spiritual attack (lest we stray too far to the one extreme referenced earlier), we are wise to have our spiritual eyes open to recognize the possibility of something going on behind the scenes.

When it comes to the evidence of spiritual warfare or demonic activity, it should be noted that there seems to be a prevalence of such activity in underdeveloped countries whereas in developed countries, these are much rarer in occurrence or perhaps simply more rarely recognized. Satan appears to have two primary approaches to the way he engages our world: 1) Evoke fear and reverence from us or 2) Be invisible to us to the point we don’t believe he exists.

³ John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 149.

The first approach is his primary strategy for underdeveloped countries. Despite undue arrogance of developed countries in our post-Enlightenment mindset, we are largely oblivious to the realities of demonic forces. Underdeveloped countries recognize these forces as part of their greater worldview and history. For people living in these areas of the world, demonic activity is accepted as a part of everyday life. There is no place to hide for Satan so his strategy is to frighten people to the point that many pay tribute to Satan and his demons to keep them at bay. There is often syncretism that results from their attempts to “cover their bases” in satisfying all “gods.” For example, in the country of Haiti, Roman Catholicism is often mixed with voodoo and other cultic/occultic practices because the people live in fear of the evil that manifests itself.

The second approach is Satan’s primary strategy in developed countries. As products of the Enlightenment Period, we tend to explain away every supernatural occurrence. There is a scientific explanation for all things. Because of this, the last thing Satan wants to do is make himself known. If people begin to believe that he and demons are real, this now opens the door to the possibility of the existence of God, a belief that is mocked by many in the scientific community. Instead, he lays low and allows us to come up with alternate explanations. Lewis recognized this strategy:

I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves...The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that, he therefore cannot believe in you.⁴

Even those who are more open to the supernatural in a developed country have tended to gravitate toward the idea of ghosts rather than demons, again keeping Satan’s true identity veiled

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Co., Inc., 1990), 39–40.

in speculation. An added advantage to the enemy regarding this belief is that wretched souls trapped between worlds is not biblical, thus casting a shadow of doubt on the validity of Scripture. Nevertheless, it appears that Satan’s strategy of concealment is beginning to shift toward manifestation in the United States as postmodernism has taken root and post-Christian is the new reality in this country. The melting pot of the United States is becoming more and more diverse with the influx of cultures from around the globe. Worldviews are shifting and interest in the supernatural continues to climb at an exponential rate. Regardless of Satan’s approach, the objective is the same: attack those who belong to God.

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. ⁹ So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him...¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been thrown to earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child...¹⁷ So the dragon was furious with the woman and left to wage war against the rest of her offspring—**those who keep God’s commands and have the testimony about Jesus** (Rev 12:7–9, 13, 17).

While this passage has many different interpretations of which are beyond the scope of the present work, our focus here is on the fact that Satan and his angels are currently waging war with those who follow Jesus. One of the primary ways he wages war is to accuse. Even the name, Satan, is defined as “the adversary” or “the accuser.”⁵ In what ways does he accuse followers of Jesus? In his book, *Fighting Satan*, Joel Beeke mentions three ways: 1) Satan accuses God to us; 2) Satan accuses us to God; 3) Satan accuses us to one another.⁶ I would like to add 4) Satan accuses us to ourselves.

⁵ Graham H. Twelftree, “Demon, Devil, Satan,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 164.

⁶ Joel R. Beeke, *Fighting Satan: Knowing His Weaknesses, Strategies, and Defeat* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 12.

First, Satan accuses God to us. Before the account of the fall in Genesis 3, God tells Adam and Eve specifically not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they will die (Gen 2:16–17). When the first couple encounters the serpent, he tells them that not only will they not die but they will also “become like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4–5). The accusation is plain to see: God was holding out on Adam and Eve.

This strategy worked with the first couple and continues to work today. Satan accuses God to us of not looking out for our best interest but wants to keep us in the dark. When crisis hits, he is quick to point out that God doesn’t really care about us or that He has abandoned us. Rather than fall prey to this type of insinuation, we must remember what He has done for us in Christ. “Look at how great a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God’s children” (1 John 3:1).

Second, Satan accuses us to God. The story of Job is a prime example of this. In the beginning of the account, Satan is described as presenting himself before God along with the other “sons of God” (angels). Notice that when Satan is asked where he has just come from, he responds by saying that he has been roaming back and forth across the earth (Job 1:6–7). This sounds very similar to the description we highlighted earlier from 1 Peter 5:8 where he is described as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The accuser is pictured as pacing across the earth, most likely looking for someone to attack/accuse. When God points out the faithfulness of His servant, Job, Satan is very quick to accuse Job of being faithful and obedient only because of God’s blessings on his life. Satan says that if God allows everything to be taken away, “he will certainly curse You to Your face” (Job 1:8–11).

The scene in heaven somewhat repeats itself after God allows Satan to take away Job’s possessions and children. Satan, once again, accuses Job of maintaining his integrity before God

this time because he has not suffered physical harm himself (Job 2:1–5). God allows Satan to inflict Job with sores all over his body yet Job continues to be faithful throughout the rest of the account.

Still another example of Satan’s accusations from Scripture is found in an obscure passage in Zechariah. In Zechariah’s fourth vision, Joshua, the high priest, is pictured as standing before the angel of the Lord. Satan “stands at his right side to accuse him.” (Zech 3:1).

While there are other passages that certainly imply Satan’s accusations, even using the law to do so (Col 2:14–15), the two examples above suffice to give biblical precedence for the fact that Satan accuses us to God. Revelation 12:10 further clarifies this truth: “The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Messiah have now come, because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown out: the one who accuses them before our God day and night.” Like Job, we are unaware of what goes on behind the scenes and the accusations made before God regarding us. We do know that Satan daily lives out his namesake of “accuser.”

Unfortunately, much of what Satan accuses us of is actually true. We are all lawbreakers (Rom 3:23) and deserving of the penalty of death (Rom 6:23) but Jesus Christ has paid our penalty for us on the cross: “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous One. He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1b–2).

Third, Satan accuses us to one another. While there is no explicit Scriptural example of Satan sowing seeds of discord, he undoubtedly does. There are accounts where God’s people are stirred up against one another (Num 16:1–7; 2 Sam 19:41–43) and many where non-believers are stirred up against God’s people (Acts 13–14) and make accusations against them (Acts 4, 6, 17,

18). Paul begins his first letter to the church at Corinth by addressing their divisions (1 Cor 1:10–17). Again, Satan is not mentioned in these passages as being behind these accusations but, knowing his nature, it is almost certain that he is.

Haven't you ever wondered why two Christian friends cannot get along? Why are church business or deacons/elders meetings some of the most mudslinging battlefields by reputation? What, or should we say who is behind most church splits? Just as Jesus explains that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" when defending himself against the accusation of casting out demons in the name of demons (Mark 3:22–30), Satan also knows the truth of this statement when it comes to God's people. We begin to find fault in everything the other does. We question one another's motives. Satan sows seeds of doubt in our hearts and minds as we relate to one another. If a body of believers is fighting among themselves, they serve as no threat to the real enemy. No wonder Jesus emphasizes unity so much in His prayer before His arrest (John 17). Instead of turning against each other, we would do well to take a step back and recognize the real enemy behind the discord. Remember, our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against evil spiritual powers (Eph 6:12).

Fourth, Satan accuses us to ourselves. One of the most devastating accusations of all is when the enemy whispers accusations in our ears. He accuses us to God and to others but this pales in comparison to the damage done when he speaks words of condemnation to us. It is the feeling of having the rug pulled out from underneath our feet. Obviously, being brought low in humility before God is a good thing. Pride is the source of the original sin and continues to be the root cause of sin today. You can see throughout the Bible, those who approach the Lord in humility are rewarded (Prov 22:4; Isa 6:5–7; Matt 8:8; Mark 1:7; Phil 2:5–11).

Furthermore, it is essential to distinguish between conviction and condemnation. In the Greek, there is much overlap between the two words, *elegcho* (“convict”) and *katakrino* (“condemn”), making it very difficult to discern the difference other than by examining the context. It might be helpful to define these terms in a modern, Christian understanding. Conviction, outside of legal contexts, is used to refer to someone who is being brought to a correct understanding for the purpose of improvement. One may be brought under conviction regarding things in their life that should not be there or regarding the truth of God’s word. The Holy Spirit brings conviction on the life of a believer (Rom 14:19–23; 1 Cor 1:10) or when calling someone to salvation (John 16:7–11; Acts 2:37; 1 Cor 14:23–25). On the other hand, condemnation is used in a much more negative light. The frequent understanding here is that someone is doomed and that there is no hope of recovering. Condemnation is spoken of many times in the New Testament regarding eternal damnation (Matt 12:37–42; Matt 23:33; John 3:17–18; Rom 5:12–18; 2 Pet 2:3–6).

To the believer, the message from God through His Holy Spirit is never one of condemnation (1 John 3:19–20) but one of conviction. The purpose of this conviction is to lead the believer to the truth (John 16:13). “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). This verse should be one we hold very closely to our hearts because this will be our protection when the enemy accuses us to ourselves. The voice that whispers in your ear “Look what you did. You’re not worthy of God’s love. In fact, you are worthless and ought to be ashamed of yourself” is not the voice of the Holy Spirit but that of the enemy. The Holy Spirit’s purpose is to pick you up, dust you off, and put you back on track. The enemy’s purpose is to kick you when you’re down. When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden, God sought after them (Gen 3:8–9) and although He banished them from the

Garden, He provided a covering for their shame (Gen 3:21) and ultimately provided a once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 9:12) to satisfy His wrath on sin (Rom 8:1–4). Satan’s goal is not to lead us to repentance with his message of condemnation but to lead us to despair and self-hatred.

Now that we have examined the reality of spiritual warfare and the ways that Satan accuses, what does a typical spiritual attack look like and how do we defend ourselves? Usually spiritual attacks include at least one of the following and often include a combination of several or all of them: 1) Fear; 2) Doubt; 3) Apathy; 4) Condemnation.

The first element of a spiritual attack is some type of **fear**. This could range from being unusually worried about a situation to demonic nightmares. The latter is rarer by far but many have experienced bad dreams that have inflicted fear upon them because of demonic themes. Still rarer are those times when demons manifest themselves but that is beyond the scope of the present work to examine. This type of fear is most often experienced in underdeveloped countries or pockets of the country who are more open to the spiritual world. The purpose here is to gain a fearful reverence for the Satanic.

The area of fear that we are going to concentrate on here is increased anxiety. Many believers have awakened with a racing heart or one that doesn’t allow them to sleep at night. When physical tests do not indicate any health concerns, they cannot figure out what the root cause is. Realized or unrealized fears can escalate to the irrational very quickly and can be paralyzing. Jesus addresses worry in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:25–34). Things that are outside of our control can appear overwhelming and the enemy likes to create a snowball effect by compounding the anxiety. Thoughts of what might happen or what we perceive others to be saying about us creep into our head. Faced with a decision, we are paralyzed with fear and bewilderment. It is important to remember that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor 14:33).

So, if you find yourself experiencing an unusual sense of fear or anxiety, it may not simply be your own worry about things in your life. It could actually be a spiritual attack aimed at rendering you immobile and ineffective.

It is important to be aware of the reality of such attacks and some of the common elements included in them so that you can recognize them when they come. At the same time, however, it is essential that we know that God is victorious and has given us what we need to stand firm against such attacks. Although Paul's description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6 is to be primarily understood as a whole rather than dissecting details of the different pieces, the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) is what believers must pick up in order to extinguish the fiery arrows of fear. 1 John 4:18 states that "perfect love casts out fear." Examining the context of this passage, it is evident that this "perfect love" is the love of God at the root of our faith. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). As we hold dear the content of our faith (the gospel), this love of God that remains in us will drive out fear. "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom should I fear?" (Ps 27:1).

The second element of a spiritual attack is **doubt**. Your relationship with God and sometimes your very faith itself come into question. A person who has been a believer for years, demonstrating fruits of the Spirit and walking closely with God can experience a spiritual attack that can make her sense that somehow her relationship with God is broken. Although unconfessed sin can impede one's relationship with God, nothing is severed (John 10:28–29; Rom 8:38–39; Phil 1:6). Thoughts of God's abandoning or cruel indifference begin to fill the head of the person under attack. I personally dealt with this shortly after college when I lacked direction and felt like I was in a rut. Although I had prayed frequently about God's will for my life, I heard nothing back. What I did hear was almost a whisper saying, "The Bible says, 'My

sheep hear My voice.’ You aren’t hearing anything. Maybe you’re not really one of God’s sheep.” This began a several months period of doubting my salvation. The enemy is very good at taking God’s word and twisting it for his own purposes (Matt 4:1–11). The whisper I was hearing was not from God.

It is essential to hold on to the above passages regarding perseverance and God’s sovereignty in salvation in times of doubt. Furthermore, this is where the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14) would be most suited for defense. Doubting one’s salvation is an attack on the heart of the believer and we would do well to remember that our righteousness is not from ourselves but from Christ who freely gives it to the one who believes.

The other decimating result of doubt is to question one’s faith itself. Although a believer may have confidence in the reliability of the Scriptures and the reality of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual attack can begin to chip this away. Gradually, God’s mere existence comes into question and the once strong believer now finds himself feeling foolish for believing something so outlandish. As mentioned above, the true believer will not fall away from the faith but he can go through periods of severe questioning that renders him completely ineffective in Kingdom work because he is having to work through his own doubts about the validity of the gospel.

We would do well to put on the belt of truth (Eph 6:14) by continuing in God’s word. Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32). The Devil is a liar (John 8:44) and the only way to destroy a lie is with the truth. We should wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17), a great offensive as well as defensive weapon that will help us attack and defend against doubt.

Although there are many historical-critical reasons for trusting the reliability of Scripture as well as scientific and philosophical reasons for believing in the existence of God, perhaps the

most important defense during these periods of doubt is remembering where God has pulled through for you in the past. This is one of the primary reasons the children of Israel built remembrance stones at the site of significant events of God's deliverance (Joshua 4) so that when they passed that way again, even in the midst of their doubts, they could not deny the fact that God showed up in the past. This, in turn, would lead them to have faith in their present and future. When my family was under the attack of doubt about whether God cared for us or not because of a situation we were faced with, we applied this passage to our own life and wrote significant events and the year in which they took place on index cards. We taped those cards all around our home so that we could have a constant reminder of the God who cares showing up.

The third element of a spiritual attack, and perhaps the subtlest, is **apathy**. Even the most vigilant believer can be fooled into thinking that apathy is always his own fault or, even worse, he is not even aware that he has begun to lose interest in spiritual things until he finds himself wandering in a spiritual wilderness. In addition to being the subtlest attack, apathy is the most damaging and widespread. How many churches and ministries are filled with leaders as well as laypeople who just don't seem to care anymore? Although they are doing spiritual things, they are simply going through the motions. There is no longer any heart behind the ministry.

Spending time alone with God is no longer something that brings spiritual refreshment but is simply a box to check off each day if that time is taken at all.

One of the most severe warnings given to the seven churches in the book of Revelation is that to the church of Laodicea. The charge is that this church had become lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. In other words, this church had become apathetic and thus, useless. Jesus warned them that He was going to spit them out of His mouth (Rev 3:14–22). This is not to say that as a result of spiritual attack, He is going to take disciplinary action but it was a result of their own

attitudes. Thus, not every bout of apathy is a spiritual attack but there are indeed many situations that are a direct result of this type of assault. The passage from Revelation reveals the dangerous side effect of apathy: uselessness. This is exactly the goal of Satan. He wants to take the believer off the field.

We must put on the helmet of salvation (Eph 6:17) to protect our minds from indifference. When we reflect on the depth of salvation and the love of God not only for ourselves but also for others, it will awaken us (Eph 5:14) to the light of God's redemptive plan in which we play a significant part. Furthermore, we should prepare our feet with the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15) so that we can turn our apathy into action. One of the most effective ways I have fought my way out of apathy over the years is to share the gospel with others. There is something about saying out loud what you believe that makes it come alive. Being obedient to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) properly aligns our priorities, enables us to be a part of God's plan, and keeps apathy at bay.

The final element of a spiritual attack is **condemnation**. Since we have already discussed this above in our distinction from conviction, we will be brief here. Satan is understood as “the accuser” so his condemning believers should not be a surprise. We have already explained that he accuses God to us, us to God, us to one another, and us to ourselves. It is this last accusation that is relevant here. We can become so guilt-stricken in our sin that we consider ourselves unworthy of God's love or to be used by Him. We wallow in our own self-pity and see no way out. Satan whispers words of condemnation that are akin to the whispers of doubt. We must remember that God took the initiative to save us from our sins while we lay helpless (Rom 5:8). Again, in the same way that the breastplate of righteousness is our defense against attacks of doubt, it is our protection from condemnation. We must be constantly and firmly convinced that

God no longer condemns us as believers (Rom 8:1) because He has already paid the penalty due to us. While we can disappoint God, we cannot make Him love us less and not even we can separate ourselves from that love (Rom 8:38–39).

When these attacks come, it is essential to remember that we serve a sovereign and victorious God. When the serpent led Adam and Eve into rebellion, God cursed the serpent and determined that the seed of the woman would crush its head, a foreshadowing and metaphor for Jesus' crushing blow to Satan on the cross (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). When Satan took everything away from Job and caused harm to his physical body, Satan was still under the sovereign rule of God who set specific parameters as to what he could or could not do to Job (Job 1–2). When Joshua the priest was being accused by Satan in Zechariah's fourth vision, the Lord rebuked Satan (Zech 3:1–2a). Every time we see Jesus encounter demons in the Gospels, they immediately recognize His authority over them and often beg Him not to destroy or torment them (Mark 1:23–27; 5:6–8; Luke 4:33–36).

As frightening as the reality of demons is, we can be assured that our God has won the war: “He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; He triumphed over them by Him” (Col 2:13–15). These are the same rulers and authorities discussed in Eph 6:12. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection was the death knell for the evil spiritual forces. Jesus not only defeated sin but also death itself and the one holding its power—Satan (Heb 2:14–15). The ultimate victory of God is spelled out in Rev 20:10 where the Devil will be thrown into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night.

When Jesus lived on earth he made the blind to see and the lame to walk; he will return to rule over a kingdom that has no disease or disability. On earth he died and was

resurrected; at his return, death will be no more. On earth he cast out demons; at his return, he will destroy the Evil One. On earth he came as a baby born in a manger; he will return as the blazing figure described in the book of Revelation. The kingdom he set in motion on earth was not the end, only the beginning of the end.⁷

I've not had many dreams involving spiritual warfare but one stands out to me. Several years ago, I dreamed that Satan was standing before me, accusing me. I don't recall what he looked like or if I even saw his appearance but I knew he was there. When I was beginning to buy into his lies, I suddenly thought about the reality of his future and told him that he had no business telling me about defeat. He had already lost the war and his fate is already certain. When I defended myself with the reality of the victory of God, he went away.

While we have the assurance of Satan's defeat, we find ourselves constantly struggling with evil in this world. This is part of what theologians refer to as the "already-not yet" concept:

The gap is somewhat like the time between lightning and thunder. In reality, they happen at the same time, but because light travels faster than sound, we see the lightning first, then, seconds later, hear the thunder. In Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, Satan fell as lightning from heaven. On judgment day, we will hear the thunder of Satan's eternal destruction.⁸

Many promises in Scripture put us in an in-between position where the victory has already been determined but we have not yet seen the full realization of that victory. God has won the war with Satan but the day to day battles still rage on in spiritual warfare. The outcome of the war was established at Jesus' death and resurrection but the final battle will be fought upon Jesus' victorious return.

For though the devil has been defeated, he has not yet conceded defeat. Although he has been overthrown, he has not yet been eliminated...on the one hand, we are alive, seated and reigning with Christ, with even the principalities and powers of evil placed by God under his feet; on the other we are warned that these same spiritual forces have set

⁷ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 253.

⁸ Beeke, *Fighting Satan*, 98.

themselves in opposition to us, so that we have no hope of standing against them unless we are strong in the Lord's strength and clad in his armor.⁹

When Paul talks about taking up the armor of God referred to here by Stott, it is because we are at war whether we like it or not. The primary point of Paul's words is to help the believer to know that they are equipped with exactly what they need for spiritual battle because our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against evil spiritual forces (Eph 6:12):

This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. In every situation take the shield of faith, and with it you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word (Eph 6:13–17).

There have been many studies done on Paul's metaphors for the armor of God and they each have unique qualities as a defensive or offensive weapon for a soldier. Rather than go into great detail here about every piece of armor, we have highlighted a few of these pieces of armor as they pertain to spiritual attack above. It is important to keep in mind that Paul used these vivid images of a soldier's outfitting to help the reader understand that they are at war. Notice that Paul says that we must put on the "full armor of God," indicating that not one piece should be lacking. The only way that a believer can take his or her stand is to be prepared with every piece of armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and God's word. Many people think of the above passage as the complete strategy for spiritual warfare but they leave out the most critical part:

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough in Him to speak as I should (Eph 6:18–20).

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ, 20th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 2006), 235.

The greatest weapon in spiritual warfare is prayer. It is our tool for communicating and connecting with our victorious God. It is not meant to be just a mealtime blessing or a rhyme we recite before bedtime. Notice that Paul concludes his passage on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 with an emphasis on prayer. His emphasis is on constant prayer for fellow believers and for boldness in spreading the gospel. The good news of Jesus spread by believers (the Church) is an unstoppable force that is described as penetrating even the gates of hell (Matt 16:18). Again, Lewis explains the power of prayer well in his classic written from the perspective of a higher-level demon (Screwtape) to his underling (Wormwood):

The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether...but you can worry him with the haunting suspicion that the practice is absurd and can have no objective result...If the thing he prays for doesn't happen, then that is one more proof that petitionary prayers don't work; if it does happen, he will, of course be able to see some of the physical causes which led up to it, and 'therefore it would have happened anyway', and thus a granted prayer becomes just as good a proof as a denied one that prayers are ineffective.¹⁰

The disciples understood the importance of prayer and even asked Jesus how to do it. Jesus gave the model in Luke 11:1–13 (cf. Matt 6:5–15). Being aware of the schemes of Satan is an important first step in being prepared to take a stand in spiritual warfare. Confidence in the victory of God reminds the believer that the outcome of the war has already been decided. In the meantime, however, it is essential to put on the entire armor of God to defend against spiritual attacks. The final and perhaps most critical component in engaging in spiritual warfare is the power of prayer (James 5:16). We are not powerful enough to overcome evil but our great God is. This is what makes prayer so important. It is our lifeline, our communication with the only One Who can truly deliver us from the evil one (Matt 6:13).

¹⁰ Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 24, 137.

Only when we realize that we are living in a deeper reality beyond what the eye can see and the ear can hear will we begin to grasp the necessity of prayer in our lives. And until we begin to value prayer, we will never find time for it. Until we recognize our desperate need for prayer and the power in it, our prayers will be no more than a letter to Santa, a wish upon a star, an empty recitation of words before a meal, or a generic request that never gets past the ceiling.

Through exploring the many tactics of Satan in this work, it becomes more and more evident that spiritual warfare is a reality which many choose to ignore. Although there is an extreme end of the spectrum where people are paranoid and almost obsessive concerning demonic activity, many of us live in the opposite end where we deny its existence. The point of this present work has been to make the reader more aware of the spiritual battles you may not realize are all around you and to help recognize a spiritual attack for what it truly is. Our purpose has also been to stress the importance of relying on God's sovereignty, salvation, and the power of prayer to not only fend off the attacks of the enemy but also to advance the gospel, the ultimate offensive weapon against the forces of evil. While the present study is not comprehensive on the complex subject of spiritual warfare, may this be a quick and accessible playbook for the many believers out there who have either never read anything on this topic or have been too afraid to confront it. Let us not only prepare ourselves for the daily battles we face but may we be an encouragement to one another (Heb 10:23–25) as we stand shoulder to shoulder against a fierce enemy whose ultimate defeat is certain but forthcoming.

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