



R E M E D I A L
Christianity

Correcting Deficiencies in Popular Christianity

#11—Spiritual Warfare

With Study Questions

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Spiritual Warfare

Yelling at the Devil

The prayers at the Bible study were getting more aggressive. It finally reached a fever pitch where the young prayer warriors were screaming at the devil, "I REBUKE YOU!" This, I was informed, was spiritual warfare. It consisted of aggressive, verbal abuse of Satan. Is it fact or fiction that Luther threw his inkwell at the devil? Do you think it actually hurt the prince of darkness? What if the devil has a sticks and stones policy? Inkwell or yelling? Which works best?

One man wrote a book teaching people how to sense the presence of the devil. A woman had been working on mastering this skill when she sensed Lucifer at the pool. She turned just in time to see her child falling into the water. She rescued the youth. But what of the poor women who have lost children? How sad and guilt ridden they must be for not having learned this satanic sixth sense.

A best selling Christian novel has demons digging their talons into unsuspecting civilians. They must be prayed off. A man I know had alienated his wife and children. He confessed to having the spirits of lust, anger, and murder. I was asked to assist in his deliverance. Instead of repenting and asking God for forgiveness he pointed to his shoulder and asked that we intercede to remove said apparitious vermin. I felt more like a ghost-buster than a pastor.

Break the bondage of Satan! Be delivered from darkness! Pray in the Spirit! All of this is more reminiscent to End of Days with Arnold Schwarzenegger than biblical Christianity. Remedial Christianity par excellence!

Yet we are called to spiritual warfare. We are also told of an arsenal with which we are to do battle against the wiles of the devil. Of what does true spiritual warfare consist? What is the weaponry? How is it to be used?

Identifying the Enemies

First let's identify the enemies of our soul. Three ever-present enemies are our own flesh, the world, and the devil.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Galatians 5:17).

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Not only do these verses reveal the enemies of our souls, they give brief instruction regarding how we are to engage. When the things we wish to do are at odds with God's revealed law, we should not do them. We should not have

undue allegiance or affections for the fleeting things of creation (the world). We should be sober (self-controlled) and vigilant (watchful) in order to avoid the wiles of the evil one. These are uncomplicated, yet very difficult things to do.

Wisdom in Battle

The Scriptures offer much wisdom in terms of our engagement with these enemies.

Watch Your Company

Engagement includes wisdom in terms of avoiding those venues which are conducive to failure.

**Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits"
(1 Corinthians 15:33).**

If you're a drunk, don't go to bars. If you're violent, don't carouse in rough neighborhoods. If you're lustful, get rid of the Internet. Don't keep company with those who desire your ruin. Don't overestimate your own intestinal fortitude.

Confession and Prayer

Engagement also includes accountability and prayer.

Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

Find another sinner (that shouldn't be too hard), confess, and pray for one another.

Know God's Law

It is quite important to know right from wrong.

**Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You
(Psalm 119:11).**

If you are unaware of what sin actually is, it's hard to see it creeping up on you.

All these, and more, are necessary functions in the battle against the flesh, the world, and the devil. These enemies work together and we need not worry about isolating them into distinct fronts. In other words, when you lose to one, you lose to them all. This is why Paul equates lying, anger, and stealing with giving a place to the devil (Ephesians 4:25-29).

Quintessential Warfare

If this all sounds way too practical, let's go to the quintessential spiritual warfare passage, Ephesians 6:10-18, to see if that is any less practical.

**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His
might (Ephesians 6:10).**

Indulge me as I will treat this introductory admonition in due time.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11).

Wiles literally means “schemes sought out” for deceiving. The devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Keep this in mind when you are criticized for your obsession with truth. We are to put on the whole armor, not just some. The great promise is that we will “**be able to stand.**” Why the armor of God and not the armor of man?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places* (Ephesians 6:12).

That our foes seem to be these spooky beings of the netherworld does not mean we should seek to astral plane out of our material bodies with light saber in hand. A spiritual warfare cross-reference gives us the nature of this contest.

For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5).

Remember the power – the weapon – of these dark rulers is primarily deceit. They’re liars and they seek to get people to believe the lies. These lies must be revealed as the falsehoods that they are. And the truth, in both person (Christ) and proposition (His word) must be inserted.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Ephesians 6:13).

Partial armor is insufficient. Manmade armor (even if it is presented as spiritual) is also lacking. It says *take* up the armor, not *make* up the armor. We now have the list of equipment. I do not believe this list is either exhaustive nor should we over-analyze how each piece of armor relates to the particular virtue. As Calvin wrote,

Nothing can be more idle than the extraordinary pains which some have taken to discover the reason why righteousness is made a *breastplate*, instead of a *girdle*.¹

I will briefly exegete what should be painfully obvious to us all.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14).

If you wish to avoid giving the devil a foothold in your life, know, believe, and profess the *truth* – truth which includes sincerity of mind and heart. Don’t be a liar

¹ Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: Ephesians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin’s Commentaries (Eph 6:14). Ages Software: Albany, OR.

or think that it's okay to lie. The whole armor would mean being truthful in every aspect of life.

Righteousness means having a devout and holy life. Don't merely avoid doing wrong things but pursue good and holy things. Love God and love your neighbor. Care for the widows and orphans. Do good unto evil. Know God's commandments and keep them. Pursue a genuine piety in your worship of God and devotion to His word and sacraments.

...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15).

As we shall shortly see, entering into this battle apart from the gospel is an exercise in futility. Man cannot climb one rung on Jacob's ladder with footwear other than the gospel. Apart from the Gospel (faith in Christ as Savior and Lord) you'll never have peace with God or the peace of God. Paul writes,

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

This peace, at one level or another, produces another peace.

You will keep *him* in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3).

The ability to stand in this battle requires ever trusting in the gospel of Christ. This is clearly put forth in the next battle command.

...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).

One must never abandon his faith in God as Lord or Savior in an effort to win battles in life. The shield of which Paul writes was a "large oblong oval door-like shield of the Romans, four feet long by two and a half feet broad."²

We see ancient war movies where the archers let their arrows fly while the men in their ranks take refuge behind their shields. Those who fear or lack faith in the shields surely perish. Christians don't run for the hills. Fiery darts, which could include tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, doubt, lust, greed, vanity, envy, etc., will eventually, not merely be deflected, but quenched.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:17-18).

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Eph 6:16). Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA.

An increased awareness and assurance of our salvation grants strength and courage for the people of God. How much faster can we run when the finish line, with all its attending prizes, is clearly before us?

If we abandon or synthesize the word of God our integrity becomes compromised. Churches that lose the Scriptures have lost every battle. They have no sword. They have replaced the power of the word with human innovation and have become their own enemy.

And finally we must persevere in prayer. Praying that God will supply all our needs according to His riches and that we might have His grace to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The Proper Battle Perspective

If there ever was a single passage spelling out the proper arsenal for spiritual warfare there it is. But before we start donning that mail which makes us able to stand against the wiles of the devil, let's put ourselves in the proper place in terms of battle.

It is not as if naked you are taking on the naked devil in the octagon down at the ultimate fighting ring. That would not be a very long fight. It would be reminiscent of the account of spiritual warfare in Acts.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:13-16).

So much for thinking the devil is intimidated by strong language.

The Defeated Enemy

Before we discuss buckling our armor and engage in our battle, let us recognize the current (defeated) nature of our enemy. Let us also take refuge in the one who defeated him. Writing of the Messiah to come, Isaiah prophesies,

Then the Lord saw *it*, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. ¹⁷ For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak (Isaiah 59:15-17).

Strong language concerning the formidable nature of the conquest of Christ is most often seen in the prophets and apocalyptic language of the Revelation. There is no man who can take rank against the enemy of God's people and succeed. No man has the

power or righteousness to intercede for God's people in such a battle – no man but the Lord Himself. And He does so with garments of vengeance and clad with zeal as a cloak. As Luther wrote,

**The prince of darkness grim
We tremble not for him
His rage we can endure,
For lo his doom is sure:
One little word shall fell him.**

The *word* being Jesus, as stated in the previous stanza

**Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus it is He
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.**

It is only when we have trusted in the One whose breastplate is righteousness indeed that we can even think of entering the battle with success. Disenfranchised from the Man of God's own choosing would consign us all to the realm of wounded and naked fools.

David and Goliath

The enemy stands as Goliath – taunting God's elect (1 Samuel 17). They have a warranted fear of a destiny of death and slavery should they confront the giant man of war. Yet a seemingly frail and meek David (the anointed one of God) takes it upon himself to defeat those who God's people could not. David slew him with a stone and relieved him of his head, reminiscent of how the seed of the woman was to crush the head of serpent (Genesis 3).

It was then, and only then, that God's people could successfully enter the battle. As is recorded

**And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.
⁵² Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the
Philistines (1 Samuel 17:51-52).**

**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His
might (Ephesians 6:10).**

The initial verse I left untreated exhorts us, as it were, to be clothed in the power of His might. Apart from faith in the Anointed One of God, all battles are lost before they begin. But those who have put their trust in Him will stand. Amen.

Questions for Study

1. Who are the enemies of the souls of men (page 1)?
2. What is good biblical wisdom in confronting these foes (page 2)?
3. What is the quintessential spiritual warfare passage (page 2)?
4. Define *wiles* (page 3).
5. What are the weapons of the dark rulers (page 3)?
6. Discuss the virtues necessary for successful spiritual warfare (pages 3-5).
7. What would happen if we sought to do battle with the devil on our own (page 5)?
8. What is the nature of our enemy (page 5)?
9. How was he defeated (pages 5, 6)?
10. How do David and Goliath illustrate Christians and Jesus (page 6)?