

TRUE SPIRITUAL WARFARE

By Denver Cheddie

I come from a Christian background where specific groups of people were considered to have the "ministry of spiritual warfare". These people were usually more "spiritual" than the rest of us. During public services, they would often indulge in the craziest practices, e.g. spinning around in circles, dancing on one foot, making funny noises, etc. They would tell people that what they do may look strange, but in the spiritual realm, strongholds and being pulled down and demons are being scattered. For a while, I tended to believe in what they were doing. Then I read the bible. Then I studied the spiritual warfare scriptures for myself.

The underlying philosophy of the above mentioned individuals, as well as many Christians, is that New Testament spiritual warfare is patterned after Old Testament warfare. For example, God told Joshua to march around the walls of Jericho, and eventually the wall (stronghold) would fall, and He would grant them the victory. So it is not uncommon to see people today marching or running around the church, thinking that in so doing, their spiritual walls or strongholds would fall. And just to reassure my readers who are not from a charismatic background, I am NOT making this up.

I am convinced, from my study of the scriptures, that New Testament spiritual warfare is very different from Old Testament warfare. It is not just that OT warfare was physical whereas NT warfare is spiritual. There is more

to it than that. It is fundamentally different. The philosophy behind it is entirely different. The OT pictured the nation of Israel invading the land of Canaan, driving out its inhabitants, and physically taking over the land. Many people thus adopt this invasion-and-take-over model of NT warfare, just in a spiritual sense. I disagree. The warfare that the NT portrays is very different. It is more like a spy infiltration type of warfare. It is more like spies entering a foreign land, with no intention of taking it over, but rather taking people out. The spies are not called upon to directly engage the enemy (for the most part) but to rescue the inhabitants from an evil empire. The basic philosophy of OT warfare is "The land is ours, let's take it." The philosophy of NT warfare is "The ship is sinking, forget about the ship, let's try to rescue as many people as we can."

Thus NT warfare is not about directly engaging the enemy in combat, i.e. "binding the devil", "rebuking the devil", "pulling down strongholds over cities" or any of the like. NT warfare is winning the lost to Christ. It is about shining your light so others can see Christ in you. NT warfare is any form of true Christian ministry and effective Christian living. In the process, the enemy may wage war against us, but our job is not to directly engage him in battle, but to be steadfast in our mission in spite of the opposition.

So do I have any scriptures to back up what I just said? I'm so glad you asked.

2 Timothy 2:3,4

These verses teach us that, as soldiers, we will have to endure hardship, and we must not be entangled with the affairs of this life. This fits perfectly into my spy analogy. The enemy will afflict us and tempt us, with the hope of diverting our attention, but we must be steadfast nevertheless.

Ephesians 6:11-18

Verses 11-13 speaks of standing firm against all the strategies of the devil. After he throws all at us that he can throw, we will still be standing firm. The devil will do anything he can to disengage us from our mission. The weapons of our warfare are intended for us to be effective in spite of this opposition.

Verses 14-17 list specific items of warfare at our disposal. Our weapons include truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace/reconciliation, faith, salvation and the word of God. It also uses the analogy of wrestling rather than boxing. We are not going to deliver any knock out punch to the enemy. The warfare that the scripture portrays is one of endurance and steadfastness despite ongoing and never-ending opposition. With the gospel of peace, we win others to Christ and out of the devil's kingdom. With truth and righteousness, others will see our light and glorify God. The devil will hurl fiery darts at us, but with faith in God, we will be able to withstand. The only offensive element in the armor is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In one sense, we can use the word of God to convince others that Jesus is the way to salvation. In another sense, we can use the word as

Jesus did in the wilderness when he resisted the devil. Note that in the wilderness, Jesus did not destroy the devil, neither did he go looking for a fight. He just resisted him. The devil tried to distract Jesus from his mission, but Jesus successfully resisted him using God's word. Similarly, the devil will try to distract us from our mission, but we must remain committed to the mission as outlined in His word.

But these scriptures hardly paint a picture of us engaging the enemy in combat and taking over his territory. It seems to indicate that warfare is effective Christian living and ministry. I don't believe that the devil is threatened by those misguided souls who think dancing in circles is warfare. He is more threatened by those who are involved in winning others to Christ, whether directly, through intercession, or otherwise. Warfare is not a choreograph of wild meaningless gimmicky motions, but rather normal Christian living and ministry.

1 Timothy 1:18-2:4

Paul is giving Timothy a charge which will enable him to wage a good warfare, as well as maintain a good conscience etc. Paul elaborates on that charge in chapter 2: it is intercession. Paul is saying that part of warfare is interceding for everyone, because God desires all to be saved. True intercession is spiritual warfare. Notice also how Paul described intercessory prayer in 1 Tim 2. He just calmly said that we should pray for everyone because God wants all to be saved, and we should especially pray for leaders

of government so we could live peaceful lives free to preach the gospel. Intercession is not making funny noises and crazy motions.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

In this scripture, Paul talks about a major enemy target, which should be a focus of our warfare – strongholds. In the Old Testament, physical strongholds would include things like walls, towers etc – anything that gave one side a strategic advantage over the other. So if the stronghold is destroyed, victory usually follows. In the New Testament, strongholds are not physical. This scripture clearly identifies strongholds as arguments and philosophies that prevent people from coming to Christ. Religion is a good example of a stronghold. Usually people steeped in their religion find it hard to come to Christ, because there is so much anti-Christian information programmed into their minds.

Spiritual warfare is to target those strongholds. Paul did not identify the weapons of our warfare in 2 Corinthians, but obviously they would be the same as the other scriptures – prayer, intercession, sharing the gospel, resisting the devil, etc. There are some intercessors who believe that when they “dance in the Spirit”, strongholds “come tumbling down”. Unfortunately the bible does not say that. The most natural reading of the NT scriptures on warfare will reveal that mental strongholds (ideas and philosophies) will be destroyed by the truth of God’s word and prayer that the Holy Spirit will open people’s eyes to the truth.

Others propound the argument that there is a hierarchy of demonic powers over people's lives, and these powers must be broken before a person can come to Christ. There is absolutely no doubt that Satan can blind people (2 Corinthians 4:4). But does God need us to defeat the devil for Him, so that He could draw people to Himself? Is God powerless to draw people to Christ because of the devil's work in their lives? That would make the devil greater than God. It is not we who break the devil's power over people's lives. It is God's word (Hebrews 4:12). It is the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:17-20). Our job is to share the truth with people, which becomes a seed planted in their hearts. Our job is to pray for them, that God will open their eyes, so that the truth may take root in their hearts. That is warfare – plowing and planting – ministry and intercession (1 Corinthians 3:6). Unless the Holy Spirit opens someone's eyes, there is absolutely nothing we can do to win that person. And if God opens that person's eyes, there is nothing the devil can do to blind them. If they still reject Christ, it will be because of their own stubbornness. The idea that if WE could only break the devil's power over someone's life they would come to Christ, is completely unscriptural. It is the Spirit and the Word, which breaks the devil's power.

Jude 9-11

This is not a typical warfare scripture, nevertheless I think it is pertinent to the discussion. I mentioned above that it is not we who break the devil's power over people's lives, but a combination of the Spirit and the Word. Yet there are people who are always "rebuking the devil" and "binding the devil".

They seem to think that by them rebuking the devil, he would be forced to retreat thus giving God an opportunity to draw the individuals to himself. The bible portrays the devil as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8,9), thus we are to be vigilant, watchful and careful. This same scripture urges us to, therefore, resist the devil, and remain steadfast in our faith in spite of sufferings. The NT simply does not paint the picture of us going after the devil and directly engaging him in battle. It simply does not. Casting out devils may be part of our gospel endeavor, but it is far from being the central focus of our warfare.

But back to Jude. This scripture discusses certain individuals who “speak evil of dignitaries”. Jude then contrasts this behavior with that of the Archangel Michael when he encountered the devil. He never rebuked him, but rather said, “The Lord rebuke you”. Interesting isn’t it. Some may counter that Michael could not rebuke the devil, but we can, since Jesus gave us all authority over him. On the contrary, Jude was 1) contrasting the behavior of Michael with those false teachers in the church, and 2) strongly implying that the devil was still a dignitary. Michael was given a mission, which concerned the body of Moses, the devil tried to distract him, but Michael was not side-tracked into a fist-fight with the devil. Instead, he was focused on doing what he was assigned to. We should do likewise.

And by the way, Jesus did NOT give US all authority over the devil. He gave his disciples that authority on the two occasions that they went out casting out devils. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said that HE has all authority. It did not say He gave it to us. He just commissioned us to go in HIS authority. We don’t have any authority over the devil unless He LENDS it to us. In Acts

1:8, we receive power to be witnesses. And casting out of devils and healing the sick have to be understood in an evangelistic context. He lends us that authority as we need it. Fist fighting with the devil is the exception rather than the normal rule of spiritual warfare.

Matthew 16:19; 18:18

These scriptures are the reason why people "bind the devil". "Devil, I bind you", they say. And I swear that some people spend more time binding the devil, than they do conversing with God. I doesn't take a genius to see that if these scriptures are read in context, they pertain to church discipline, not binding the devil. Binding refers to cutting fellowship with certain people, who are corrupting others. Loosing refers to forgiving them when they repent and accepting them back into fellowship. In a sense that is warfare, but it certainly does not have anything to do with binding the devil. But error hidden behind terminology has a way of slipping under our radar.

Evangelism not Personal Blessings

There are those who see warfare as a tool for receiving our blessings from God. Some believe that when God gives us something, the devil attempts to steal it, and warfare is how we take it back from him. One preacher had this theory. He said that God is in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:20), while the devil is in the high places (Ephesians 6:10, KJV). So whatever God gives

us must first pass through the devil before we can get it. The devil often stands in the way of our blessing, and we must learn to take back what the devil has stolen. This, of course, overlooks the scriptures that say we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), where we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Their basic idea is that warfare is about getting blessings from God. I don't know what kind of impotent God gives someone a blessing, such that the devil steals it before the person could get it, then turns to the person and says, "If you want it, you have to take it from the devil." That's not the God of the bible. Even judges in a court of law are more powerful than that. Could you imagine Job trying to rebuke the devil and take back all the health and wealth that he lost? It was all God's doing. He couldn't rebuke the devil.

But this leads to another very interesting point. It concerns the place of the devil in God's plans. Scriptures depict the devil as a dog on a leash. Scriptures indicate that God uses the devil to accomplish some of His work (1 Kings 22:19-23). It was God who was ultimately responsible for Job's calamities, since He was the one who removed that protecting hedge. Otherwise the devil could do absolutely nothing. So if God is the one who regulates the devil's leash, and the devil could only do as much as God allows him to do, what place is there for rebuking the devil?

If God wants to give you something, He will. No devil could stop it. We ask God, and we receive. The devil does not even come into the picture. It wasn't the devil who prevented Abraham from having a child all those years.

It was God who made him wait. It wasn't the devil who prevented Hannah from having children. It was God who shut up her womb (1 Samuel 1:5). I don't know why it is that people make the devil such a central part of New Testament Christianity. They are more pre-occupied with fighting the devil than they are with serving God. That is exactly what Jesus did not do. That is exactly what spiritual warfare is not.

Conclusion

New Testament spiritual warfare is more of a spy infiltration mission than an invasion and take-over. True warfare is effective Christian living and ministry. It is not about charismatic gestures and gimmicks. Neither is it a tool for getting what we want from God. It is even inaccurate to say that warfare is a precursor to evangelism. Evangelism is warfare. It is not something separate from warfare. Warfare is all that pertains to evangelism – prayer, intercession, living godly lives, sharing the message, endurance in spite of tribulations, etc. Warfare is normal Christian living as we go about our God given mission to infiltrate the devil's kingdom and rescue the perishing.

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