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1

The Biblical Perspective of Warfare

For we wrestle . . . against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world.

Ephesians 6:12 (KJV)

The devil made me do it!" One heard that statement a lot in the early 1970s, when comedian Flip Wilson, in the role of Geraldine Jones, made it famous. Later, posters, bumper stickers, and lapel pins kept the theme going. Most people laughed and smiled at this attempt of people to excuse themselves of any guilt for their sins. How we would like to laugh away the problem of sin and the misery and torment it often brings!

Such levity about Satan and his part in our sins is actually a subtle satanic strategy against us. The prince of this world sees to it that the world he controls laughs him off with indifferent levity. Christians ought never to enter into joke-making about Satan or hell. While believers do need to exercise care in not assigning all of their wrongdoing as Satan's responsibility, we must with biblical insight appreciate the diabolical power of Satan's kingdom to influence us.

God's greatest servants have always shared an appreciation of the power of Satan and his kingdom and the complete victory

over Satan's kingdom that is available to all believers through the mighty Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude warns us of apostate teachers who are "filthy dreamers," and part of whose folly is to "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8 KJV). He goes on to show how even Michael the archangel did not dare to judge Satan, but appealed to the Lord to rebuke him (v. 9).

Careful study of the epistles of Paul soon reveals the depth of understanding the Holy Spirit brought to the apostle concerning the need for wisely approaching spiritual warfare. The book of Ephesians is the New Testament handbook on spiritual warfare. Paul closes this epistle with a focus that seems to make successful spiritual warfare against Satan an important key to the message of the whole epistle. A believer's ability to enjoy the lofty spiritual benefits set forth in the first five and one-half chapters of Ephesians depends upon being strong in the Lord and effective in one's warfare against Satan and his kingdom.

Martin Luther was also one who saw the need to enter into aggressive, biblically sound warfare against Satan and his kingdom. It is traditionally accepted that Luther so surely was aware of Satan's presence on one occasion that he threw his ink bottle at him. It is not difficult to believe such tradition when one sings the words of his great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

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.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to
undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph
through us.
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.

That word above all earthly powers—no thanks to them—
abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us
sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.¹

The believer's emphasis in spiritual warfare must be upon a biblical, doctrinal approach to the subject. Subjective feelings, emotional desires, and fervent sincerity are not sufficient weaponry against Satan. He yields no ground to emotion or sincerity. He retreats only from before the authority the believer has

through his union with the Lord Jesus Christ and the absolute truth of the Word of God.

Many in the more feeling-oriented communities of believers are to be commended for their awareness of the need to see people loosed from Satan's bondage. However, if one might be permitted to exercise a note of loving concern, it has been my observation that far too many of these believers have substituted feelings, desire, and fervency of emotion in place of objective doctrinal truth. The defeat of our enemy depends on our reliance upon the Word of God and the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of God recognizes that we face three unique enemies that seek to defeat the spiritual life of believers. Commonly we speak of these three as the world, the flesh, and the devil. Each of these enemies has a unique and particular role to play in the warfare against believers. It is vital to our victory in the Lord Jesus Christ that we know how each of these enemies seeks to turn us aside from our purchased possession and position of victory. It is important for us to be able to discern what kind of temptation or testing we are facing in a given situation.

When a person becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, his relationship to everything in the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional world undergoes a radical change. The person is a new creation, and everything is becoming new. The believer is a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20); he is God's child (John 1:12) and an heir of God. Believers are appointed to suffer with Christ and to be glorified together with Him (Romans 8:16–17).

Because of this new relationship to God, all believers are marked targets for attack from the same enemies that oppose and attack the person, plans, and purposes of God. With such relent-

less plan of attack against us, believers must know all they can about their available defense system and their weapons of warfare.

Many years ago, while pastoring in Colorado, I witnessed the fascinating development of the beautiful new Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs. The U.S. government purchased thousands of acres of land and then proceeded to pour multiplied millions of dollars into the construction of one of the most beautiful campuses in the world. Through a careful screening process, the U.S. Air Force seeks to recruit the cream of American youth. For four years in a highly disciplined academic community, these gifted young men and women are trained and conditioned in the finest military tradition. Graduation day is just the beginning of many more years of further training and preparation to defend our country and to prepare for military warfare. Our government demands that our military leaders spend much of their adult lives studying, improving, and perfecting military strategy.

The point begins to become obvious, doesn't it? If earthly military needs demand such study and careful preparation, how much more demanding should be our preparation to meet our enemy. The believer who does not become familiar with spiritual warfare will indeed be a poor soldier of Jesus Christ. The believer's enemies are engaged in unprecedented activity against him today. One's own observations, the entertainment industry, the mass media, and numerous books by Christian authors all sound the alarm. Christians are under concentrated attack today.

It is vital that we have doctrinal or biblical answers to such basic questions as: How do I recognize the world's attempts to press me into its mold, and how do I overcome the world? How do I defeat the works of my fleshly nature? How do I recognize temptations and testing from Satan and his demons, and what

defeats these focused efforts to destroy me? Biblical answers to these questions will equip members of our Lord's body to walk in the spiritual health which has been supplied by their Head.

A number of years ago, I led a young lady in her early twenties to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. She was radiant over her newfound joy and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. Some very defeating sins and problems with nightmares and fears disappeared immediately. She was set free in Christ. Through neglect on my part and the young lady's own choice, however, adequate follow-up and careful grounding in the Word of God was not achieved. She lived some distance from the church, and after a few weeks, her attendance became very sporadic. Fleshly sins, which had been a prominent part of her life before her conversion, continued; they were tolerated and excused with little concern.

After about a year had passed, this girl returned to my study for counseling. "It didn't last, Pastor," she said. "It was wonderful at first, but now my problems are much worse than before I received Christ. My nightmares are more hideous than ever, and I'm afraid all the time. I guess it just doesn't work for me."

This babe in Christ had become a tragic victim of her enemies. She did not know how to recognize and defeat the enemies which were out to destroy her spiritual victory and rob her of the enjoyment of God's will. Her experience abounds in the body of Christ today. The world, the flesh, and the devil must be challenged and defeated by the victory won for us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE

1. Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," trans. Frederick H. Hedge. In public domain.