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1 THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE

Remember that old newsreel that shows President Franklin Roosevelt addressing Congress the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941?

Calling it “a day that will live in infamy,” the president declared that in reality, America was already at war. Roosevelt just needed a declaration of Congress to make it official.

I am not the president, but I have a declaration to make. You and I are at war! In fact, we are engaged right now in the mother of all battles. No war in history can compare with the battle you and I are fighting. It can be either the cause of your greatest joy as a Christian, or of your deepest pain.

The war I am talking about is the spiritual warfare that you became a part of the day you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

This war affects every area of your life. There is no way you can

avoid the conflict. There is no bunker or foxhole you can crawl into that will shield you from the effects of this cosmic battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan.

A lot of Christians don't even know they're at war. But others can see the results of the battle in their lives, because they have become casualties of spiritual warfare. Some Christians are emotional casualties of spiritual warfare. They are discouraged, depressed, downtrodden, and defeated. Others are marital and family casualties. Divorce, conflict, and abuse are some of the battle scars these believers bear.

Still others have been morally wounded in the battle. They cannot control their passions, or else they make poor moral choices. For some Christians, the wounds have been inflicted on their finances. It's not just a matter of how they use their credit cards. They are losing the financial battle because they are losing the spiritual battle.

I could list more casualties, but you get the idea. Since we are all at war, and since there is so much at stake both here on earth and in eternity, we'd better find out what spiritual warfare is about and how to fight the battle successfully. That's what I want to help you do in this book.

THE ESSENCE OF THE BATTLE

Let me begin by stating the obvious. The essence of the war we are talking about is spiritual.

The reason I need to state this is not so obvious. Because this warfare is first and foremost spiritual and not physical, the degree to which you and I will be successful is the degree to which we are prepared to understand and fight this battle on a spiritual level.

A Definition

Perhaps a definition will help. Spiritual warfare is that conflict being waged in the invisible, spiritual realm that is being manifest in the visible, physical realm.



In other words, spiritual warfare is a battle between invisible, angelic forces that affects you and me. The cause of the war is something you and I can't see. But the effects are very visible in the kinds of problems I mentioned above and in the day-to-day stuff you and I face all the time.

It's hard enough to fight an enemy you can see. It's much harder to fight someone you can't see. In his classic statement on spiritual warfare, Paul wrote: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

This verse identifies the enemy, Satan and his demons. We'll develop all of this as we go along, but the point I want you to see here is that we make a grand mistake if we think people are the real enemy.

People can be bad, no doubt. But as bad as people can be, they are merely conduits for this greater battle. Satan has been successful in getting us to fight people rather than fighting that which is causing people to be the way they are.

All of us have tried to change people who are not doing right. What we need to understand is that what happens through people, including you and me, has its roots in something much larger. This fact does not excuse the wrong things people do. They are still responsible. But it helps us focus on the real enemy. Let me set down a foundational principle for spiritual warfare: Everything we see in the visible, physical realm is caused, provoked, or at least influenced by something in the invisible, spiritual realm. Your five senses are not the limit of reality.

Daniel 4:26–32 states that heaven rules over all the affairs of earth. So until we address the spiritual causes of a problem, we will never fix the physical effects of that problem.

Not only are your physical senses very limited, but they are often of little help in spiritual warfare. This means that if you are going to wage successful spiritual battle, you need a "sixth sense"—a keen awareness of the spiritual realm. This awareness begins with your worldview.

Two Worldviews

Your worldview is simply the lens through which you perceive reality. It has to do with the presuppositions that determine what you believe and the way you look at life.

There are really only two categories of worldviews. One is a natural or materialistic worldview, what people today call the scientific worldview. This view says that man by his reason can figure out how the world works. People who hold this view seek life's answers in the natural realm. If you can put it in a test tube, examine it under a microscope, or explain it through natural processes, that's all you need.

The naturalistic view is not sufficient because it is limited to the physical realm. Therefore, it doesn't answer the ultimate questions: who you are, where you came from, why you are here. It doesn't answer the question of the first cause, how this universe got started.

The naturalistic worldview also doesn't explain things like why teenagers are killing each other and why the moral standards of mankind are being eroded. This view does not address the invisible part of human beings, the soul and spirit.

This worldview has quite naturally led to agnosticism and atheism. That is, you don't need God as long as you have test tubes, microscopes, and telescopes.

The tragedy is that many Christians live as though they hold this view, although they would never admit it. But we are talking about the way people think and behave, not what they say.

I can say loudly, "I believe in God!" But if I don't live as if I believe in God, then people can rightly challenge whether I really do. I just know the right theological terms to use to make everybody else think I believe in God. A person's worldview is demonstrated by his feet, not just his tongue. In other words, his walk has to match his talk.

The second category of worldviews is the spiritual worldview, which says there is a realm outside of the physical. We have to rec-

ognize that there are competing spiritual worldviews, just as there are many variations of the naturalistic worldview.

A spiritual worldview is very popular right now, but unfortunately it is often not a biblically based, theistic view that believes in the one true God.

Instead, it is a man-centered view that believes in any form of spirituality that seems to pay off. This is the world of horoscopes, palm readers, and all sorts of New Age teaching. When people pick up their newspapers and turn to their horoscope for the day, they're looking for something outside of this world that will guide their lives and their decision making.

Obviously, this is not the worldview of the Bible. It is possible to have a spiritual worldview that is plugged into the wrong spirit. Your worldview affects your approach to spiritual warfare because it colors the way you see the nonmaterial world—and it determines whether you even believe in a spiritual realm.

In order to understand spiritual warfare, we have to address it through the lens of the spirit, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The worldview of this book is, of course, a spiritual one that assumes the power of the Holy Spirit and the rest of the Godhead. Although we will be spending a lot of time on the role of angels (good and evil) in the spiritual battle, ultimately we are dealing with God.

THE IMPACT OF THE BATTLE

Even though the battle we are talking about is spiritual in nature, it has very definite effects in the visible, physical realm. You know you're in a battle when you get shot and start bleeding. We are seeing the "bleeding," the result, of spiritual warfare in at least four areas of life today.

Personal Impact

Many believers are seeing the wounds of spiritual warfare in their personal lives. This doesn't mean these people are doing some-

thing really bad. It could be that they have a problem such as uncontrolled anger.

Our emotions can give the devil an entry into our lives. To see the relationship between your emotions and spiritual warfare, look at several familiar verses in Ephesians: “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (4:25–27).

Please notice that failing to control anger grants the devil an opportunity to get a foothold in your life. Then he can use it as a base of operations to launch more spiritual attacks against you.

Many Christians are suffering today because of anger that was not resolved yesterday—and anger is just one of an assortment of human emotions. If Satan can seize our emotions, he can destroy our ability to function by crippling us emotionally or leading us into all manner of destructive and addictive behavior.

We could multiply these examples, but suffice it to say that the personal effect of spiritual warfare is great.

Family Impact

Many believers are also feeling the effects of spiritual warfare in their families. The devil messed up the first family in the Garden of Eden, and we have been dealing with the effects of Adam’s and Eve’s sin ever since.

Let me give you a specific example of family relationships and spiritual warfare. Paul wrote to husbands and wives in 1 Corinthians 7:5, “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Paul is saying that when a husband and wife don’t have a fulfilling sexual relationship, the devil sees that lack as an opportunity to come in and bring about moral destruction in the family. So this

thing of spiritual warfare gets right down to the nitty-gritty aspects of everyday life.

Church Impact

Spiritual warfare also has an impact on church life. Paul told Timothy to watch out for “doctrines of demons” that will infiltrate the church (1 Timothy 4:1). The church is being undermined in many places today by teachers who purport to teach the Bible, but are teaching doctrines from hell.

Anyone can quote the Bible. But we need to be like the Bereans, who checked out what Paul and Silas were teaching them to see whether their teachings agreed with the Scriptures (see Acts 17:11). Some people will say amen to things that aren’t in the Bible, simply because the person saying them is using the Bible. But the devil will use, or misuse, the Scriptures when it is to his advantage to do so.

Cultural Impact

Finally, spiritual warfare affects the life of a nation, the culture in which we live.

According to passages like Daniel 10, entire nations are influenced by the invisible battle in the angelic realm. Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” with good reason (Ephesians 2:2).

In other words, you and I are breathing this stuff. It’s in every compartment of life. There is no place we can go to escape the effect of spiritual warfare. We need to learn how to fight. Our ability to deal with the spiritual realm will determine whether we win or lose in the physical realm.

Satan’s job is to get us to ignore the spiritual realm or give it low value (or look at it inappropriately and worship spiritual beings other than God). If he can divert us from the spiritual realm, he can divert us from finding spiritual solutions.

THE LOCATION OF THE BATTLE

Where in the universe is this great battle called spiritual warfare being fought? Paul tells us it is “in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12), which means the spiritual realm.

The Heavenly Places

In the Bible, the word *heaven* describes three levels of existence (see 2 Corinthians 12:2). The first heaven is the atmosphere that surrounds the earth, the environment in which we live.

The second heaven is what we commonly refer to as outer space, the stellar heavens where the stars and planets exist. This is also a realm in which angels operate, because in the Bible angels are often called stars (Job 38:7).

When you see the stars at night, they should remind you of spiritual beings called angels and the reality of the warfare we are engaged in. I'll have more to say on this in the next chapter.

The third heaven is the throne room of God, the place we normally think of when we hear the word *heaven*. It is about this heaven that the Bible has the most to say. In fact, the third heaven is a very busy place because it is the control center of the universe.

In the book of Ephesians alone, we find numerous references to heavenly places in addition to the reference in 6:12. I want to review these with you, because understanding how to tap into the heavenly places is crucial to waging victorious spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” This verse tells us that God resides in the heavenly places, and so do *all* of our spiritual blessings.

This is important because if you are engaged in a spiritual battle and need help to win, the help you need is with God the Father,

an angel to beat an angel. Remember, Satan and his demons are also “in the heavenly places” (6:12).

See, if your problem originates in the heavenly places, you need a solution that originates in the heavenly places. Most of us have very little consciousness of angels because they’re not part of our physical world. But we need to understand that the angels of God and the demons of hell are the “foot soldiers” in the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

When you hear believers say they are being attacked by the devil, they probably mean they are being harassed by his foot soldiers. Satan is a limited being. He is not everywhere present, all-knowing, or all-powerful.

Satan is not God, but he has a whole host of evil angels called demons he can use for spiritual attacks. Anything that hell can bring against you is the result of satanic activity in the same realm in which God operates, called heavenly places.

You and I are no match for the power and deceptiveness of Satan and his army. We need the power of God to neutralize Satan’s attacks against us.

If you need divine help but don’t have a “heavenly places” mindset, you won’t know how to get the help you need at the time you need it. Since Ephesians says that everything related to our warfare is in the spiritual realm, we need to know how to reach into the heavenly places for help. That’s where the action is.

The good news is, you can take a trip to the spiritual realm any time you feel like it—because spiritually, you’re already there. You are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

A Spiritual “Capitol Hill”

In Washington, D.C., sits Capitol Hill, where Congress makes decisions about how our country will be run. What is decided there will affect you no matter where you live.

On Capitol Hill two parties are vying for power and control.

result is that the effect of the kingdom of darkness comes upon them, even though they're part of the kingdom of light.

One evening my wife, Lois, and I were having dinner in the home of one of the associate pastors at our church in Dallas. This pastor is from Nigeria, and the dinner included foods and spices from Africa.

Lois and I wanted to know where we could get these items, so our hosts told us about a store in Dallas that specializes in foods and spices from different cultures, especially Africa and the Caribbean.

In other words, I could go to that store and find a little bit of Africa. Or I could find a little bit of the Caribbean in the food items on the store's shelves. All I had to do to enjoy African or Caribbean cuisine was make my purchase.

That's what God has done. He has stocked earth with heaven, so all you and I have to do to enjoy the benefits of heaven is shop at the right store.

The reason so many believers are messed up is that they have been shopping at the wrong store, picking up goods that don't belong to the kingdom of God. They are shopping in the devil's kingdom and wondering, *Why am I so spiritually weak all the time? Why am I always so defeated in spiritual warfare?*

The devil is smart. He knows how to make the merchandise on his store shelves look inviting. He knows how to make you want to pick up his stuff and buy it, because it looks good. But it's not good for you. It will make you spiritually weak and sick.

THE ENEMY IN THE BATTLE

Revelation 12 depicts a day when the invisible warfare in the heavenly places will break out in a very visible form.

We will consider this passage in more detail later, so I just want to note right now that verse 7 shows us the enemy in this conflict called spiritual warfare: "And there was war in heaven, Michael and

his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war.”

The archangel Michael and the holy angels are fighting Satan and the angels who rebelled with him. The battle is angelic, but they are fighting over the earth.

So the war in heaven directly affects what is happening on earth. We are in the midst of an angelic conflict, a satanic rebellion, in which Satan is seeking to bring this whole world under his domain. That means when you were born into the kingdom of God, you were born into a war.

You may not want to be born into a war, but you have been. It’s like the children who are born in Israel. The moment they come out of their mothers’ wombs, they are part of an age-old conflict. Surrounding them are people who consider themselves Israel’s enemies, and the battle is on for the land that is claimed both by the Israelis and the Arabs.

The Enemy’s Goal

We are surrounded by our spiritual enemy, but the battle is not for land or anything physical. This cosmic battle is for *glory*. The issue is, who is going to get the glory in this universe? Who is going to be worshiped?

Satan said to God, “You cannot have all the glory in creation. I want some of the glory for myself.”

God’s response was, “My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 48:11).

Satan said, “You are going to share glory with me. Let’s go to war.”

The battle is for glory, for the throne of creation. Praise God the outcome has never been in doubt, but the battle goes on every day in our personal, family, church, and community lives as to who will get the glory by what we do.

That’s why Paul told us, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of

God” (1 Corinthians 10:31; see Colossians 3:23). This is the essence of the battle.

The Enemy's Strategy

What is Satan's battle strategy in spiritual warfare? The Bible gives us his basic plan.

The fact that Satan has a plan is very clear. Ephesians 6:11 speaks of Satan's "schemes," and Paul said, "We are not ignorant of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Further on in 2 Corinthians, Paul outlined the schemes of the devil. Speaking to this carnal church, the apostle wrote, "I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (11:3).

Satan's battle strategy is simple. He is out to deceive us, to trick us into buying his lies and temptations. He's been at his plan for countless years, and he's good at it. Paul even said that Satan can disguise himself as an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Satan has a lot of different schemes to draw on, one of them being the use of false and deceptive teachers, as the passage above speaks about. We'll get into these schemes in future chapters, but this is the bottom line of Satan's strategy: He wants you to think he is right; he wants you to follow him and not God. And not only is Satan good at what he does; he can give you a good time while he is deceiving you.

STRENGTH FOR THE BATTLE

Since I don't know where you are in your Christian life, I don't know where you stand in relation to the reality of spiritual warfare.

You may be one of those believers who didn't realize the Christian life is a war. If so, this chapter, and this book, will be a real eye-opener for you. Or you may be a Christian who knows there's a war on, and you have been feeling the effects of your bat-

tle scars. You may have been experiencing defeat at the hands of Satan.

Paul said in Colossians 1:13–15 that everyone who comes to Jesus Christ for salvation is delivered from the domain of the devil. When you received the Lord Jesus as your Savior, God set you free.

You may be wondering, *If God set me free, why am I still in bondage to the devil in my daily life? If I'm on the winning side, why am I losing so often?*

There can be a number of answers to that question, but many believers are suffering defeat in spiritual warfare because they are trying to fight Satan in their own strength.

Our Source of Strength

I have news for you. Satan isn't afraid of you at all! He's not afraid of me either. But he cannot stand up against God for even a second.

That is why Paul wrote, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10–11). It is when God fights the battle for you, not when *you* fight the battle for you, that you win against the Evil One.

Lack of victory in the spiritual battle reflects a lack of understanding of our divine resources. Every Christian has problems, but it's the inability to move beyond the problem, the inability to get past the failure, that keeps us in spiritual defeat. Victory is found in dependence on God, so Satan's plan is to detach us from dependency on God.

Time to Fight

No matter where you are in your Christian walk right now, it is not too late to put on the armor of God, pick up your God-given weapons, and join the battle. It's time that we learn to wage victorious spiritual warfare using divinely provided weapons. Only then

will we experience the thrill of victory rather than the agony of defeat.

Let me tell you the benefits of being a soldier. When a nation is at war, the government's first priority is to feed and clothe its soldiers, not its civilians. Soldiers who give themselves to fight can do so knowing that the government they are fighting for is committed to putting clothes on their backs, food in their stomachs, and ammunition in their weapons. Paul asked, "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?" (1 Corinthians 9:7). Answer: no one. When you enlist in God's army, He picks up the tab.

Our problem today is that we have too many Christian civilians and not enough Christian soldiers. Some of us simply want to jump into a soldier's uniform when we run into a problem, rather than understanding we *are* soldiers who are supposed to be in uniform at all times because we are in a war.

You can take a major step toward victory right now by praying something like this: "Lord, I am facing Satan in these areas of my life [name the areas]. These are the areas where Satan is attacking me and where I am being defeated in my personal life, family life, church life, and life in this culture. I can't beat Satan on my own, so I am going to stand against him in Your name and Your strength, using the resources You have provided."

Remember, the devil isn't afraid of us. Trying to stand against him in our strength is like me telling the heavyweight boxing champion, "I rebuke you in the name of my fist." So what? The champ has nothing to worry about from me. Satan is so strong that even the archangel Michael didn't try to fight him one-on-one. Instead, Michael said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9).

So when you fight the devil this week, instead of trying to prove how strong you are, tell God how weak you are. Instead of arguing you *can*, tell God you *can't*. Instead of saying, "I know I have the ability," tell God, "I don't have the ability." And then trust the Lord's strength and His ability as you use His weapons to deal with the enemy in your life.



We are at war, but it's not like other wars. Christ has already won this war! All we have to do is enlist, put on our fatigues and our boots, and pick up our weapons, because it's time to march!

It's time to win some spiritual battles in every aspect of your life. This book was written to help show you how.