

Spiritual warfare – from www.ficm.org freedom in Christ website

It has been a long pilgrimage, but today we would define spiritual warfare essentially as the battle for the mind. Satan is a liar and deceiver ([John 8:44](#); [Rev. 12:9](#)) and his deception operates in the areas of power and truth. In a sense it is all a matter of truth, including the truth about power, but power is such a significant element in the lives of so much of the world's population that it deserves special attention. The primary power issues are the creation of fear and the seeking of knowledge or power from a supernatural source other than God. The primary truth issues are the character of God and the nature of our relationship to Him "in Christ."

The Christian's Stance toward Satan

For some reason most of the church seems to teach its members that, if they are good Christians, Satan can't do anything to them. Therefore, the best thing to do with Satan and demons is to ignore them. The only problem is that that is not what the Bible says. There are numerous warnings about satanic activity in the Scriptures, and all of them are addressed to believers. Peter, for example, in 1 Peter 5:8-9a says, "Be self -controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. . . ."

The Greek words translated "self-controlled and alert" which Peter uses here are the same words Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 to speak of the second coming of Christ. We are to be self-controlled and alert in order to be ready to meet the Lord with no advanced notice whether that be in a sudden, accidental death or in a secret rapture. Peter is therefore telling us that we need to be ready to meet the devil at any moment. That doesn't mean we lead a Satan-centered life, but it does mean that we need to be constantly alert to the "fiery darts" (Eph. 6:16) which Satan sends our way.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Christians are not immune from Satan's deception, and unless they use the armor and the weapons provided, they may become his victims. If that were not so, Peter would have said, "Yes, you have an adversary, but don't worry about him. He can't do anything to you. Your Father will protect you." It is certainly true that when we do things God's way, God will be responsible for the results, but if we do not do things God's way, we have to be responsible for the results. Too many people want to live life their own way and then expect God to protect them from the devices of the enemy. It just doesn't work that way.

The Christian and Demons

To what extent can Satan/demons influence a Christian? It is clear that believers can be tempted and that they can yield to temptation. It is also clear that they can be deceived. The degree to which a believer believes and lives out a lie of Satan is the degree to which Satan has control in his/her life. Paul indicates that believers can give foothold (literally "a place," Eph. 4:26,27) to Satan. The only place one can give Satan a foothold is in one's own life. He already is the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30) and the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2); so we can't give him a "place" out there.

But can a Christian be possessed by a demon? Definitely not. We have been bought with the price of the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18,19). We belong to Christ. Some people use "possessed" to refer to any activity of Satan in a believer. That makes this question an either-or issue. Either you are possessed or you aren't, and if "possession" includes influence and control, then the real issue is confused. I believe the original language does not support the broad definition of "possess," and I use it only in relation to non-Christians.

Sometimes the question arises whether a Christian is really secure in Christ if he/she can come under demonic attack. The Bible warnings concerning demonic activity are all addressed to believers; so it is evident that Christians can come under attack. There is also abundant evidence that God has provided the resources for the believer to be victorious over such attacks. But the responsibility for choosing truth, for using the armor, for doing the resisting is clearly on the Christian. God does not do that for us. He commands us to use the resources He has provided (John 8:31,32; Eph. 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9). This issue in this struggle is not salvation; it is fellowship with the Father and victory in the Christian life.

The Christian's Enemy

The Bible does not give us a nice narrative account of how Satan became the fiend he is today. It appears that he was one of the higher ranking angels and that he became jealous of God's glory. He then decided to try to get some of that glory for himself by having other angels and humans treat him like a god. He tried this with Jesus when he offered Him all the kingdoms of the world "if You will bow down and worship me," that is, treat me like God (Matt. 4:9). The "man of lawlessness," whom I assume to be possessed by Satan, "will oppose and exalt himself over all that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

When he chose to rebel against God in this way, God did not immediately execute punishment against him. The punishment has been determined (Matt. 25:41) but has not yet been enforced. In the meantime, Satan is the "roaring lion" Peter warns us about who is making war on the saints. While

he may find a depraved kind of glee in seeing those who are already in his kingdom suffer, he is especially concerned about those who have forsaken his kingdom for the kingdom of God. Believers can live to the glory of God, and that is something he wants to prevent at all costs. It could be argued that his primary aim for Christians is to get them to live at a level that is less than to the glory of God. I call it the wilderness of spiritual mediocrity.

The Attack on God and His Children

Israel was told in one of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not bear [literal translation] the name of the Lord in vain" (Ex. 20:7). The usual interpretation is that we should not use the name of God as an oath or curse, and it certainly means that. I believe, however, that there is a much deeper meaning. The Hebrew word is *nasa*, and it means to lift up, to bear, or to carry. Israel was to "bear" the name of Yahweh among all the nations of the world. They were to be called the people of Yahweh. I believe the Lord is saying to them, "You are to be known as the people of Yahweh. Be sure that you do not bear that name among the nations in an empty, vain way." The New Testament version is stated in a positive mode and is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Because the glory of God is the real issue, Satan's first attack is always on the character of God. His primary tactic is always deception (Rev. 12:9). Jesus called him a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and he begins with lies about God. This battle for the mind of man began in the garden when he led Eve to question the trustworthiness and love of God. He convinced her that God was not telling her the truth when He said that they would die if they ate of the forbidden fruit. "On the contrary," Satan said, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Eve "saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom." By implication Satan is saying, "How can you believe that God loves you when He won't let you have such a desirable fruit as that?" The first two items in Eve's conclusion were true, but the third was a lie. And as soon as Eve began to question whether God could be trusted and whether He really loved them, the step into sin was an easy one.

If God cannot be trusted and He does not really love us, then it is no great thing to be His child. Who needs a father like that? And this is precisely the approach Satan has been using ever since that day in the garden. The battle for the mind always begins with the character of God and moves to our identity as the children of God. If those two items in our belief system are based on Satan's deceptions, the rest of our theology and our living will be affected adversely, and other lies will more readily be accepted.

One area of life where Satan loves to take advantage of this lie is in his use of fear. Fear is a great controller, and if God is not really trustworthy and reliable, then I need to fear many things. The most frequent command in the Bible is "fear not." It is repeated many times because God's people have so

easily fallen victim to fear when they began to doubt the character and promises of their Father.

But Satan also takes advantage of our low view of God by suggesting that there is a supernatural source of information and power apart from God. This opens up the whole world of occult practices that are so common in the world. Satan has enough power that he can deliver on some of his promises, but he never does it for our good. He does it only as a means of gaining control over us. He wants us to keep coming back to him for knowledge and power.

Once we open the door to our spiritual enemy through listening to one of his lies, he will seek to establish a stronghold in us in that particular area. This is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4:26-27 when he says we should not allow anger to go unresolved, because to do so gives the devil a place (*topos*) in our lives. That does not mean we are "demon possessed." It simply means that Satan has a "foothold" (NIV) in our lives from which he will seek to exercise more and more control. From there he will seek to affect other areas of our lives.

Freedom through the Truth

If spiritual warfare is a battle for the mind, and if Satan's primary tactic is lying or deception, then the Christian answer is the truth that comes from God. The battles we face that are in the nature of spiritual warfare require that we ask the truth questions about what we believe about God and about our relationship to God, and the truth about the circumstances from our past or those we are facing in the present. As we chose to speak the truth about everything in our lives and as we deal honestly before God with any unresolved sin issues in our lives, we can win the battle. *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* provide a tool to assist the believer to look honestly at all of these areas of life and to find resolution to spiritual problems and areas of bondage. *The Steps* are not a cure-all for all of one's problems. The physical and psychological/emotional areas may need the help of those professionally qualified in these areas. (See *Finding Hope Again* by Anderson and Baumchen for a full discussion of a holistic approach to healing.)

Resisting the Devil

Some assume that the Bible teaches that a Christian can never be demonized and that it is never necessary or even proper to resist the devil directly or verbally. Resisting is defined in terms of walking in obedience to God and His Word, denying oneself, and resisting temptation. If that is the only definition, why didn't James simply say, "Submit to God"? Why did he add, "Resist the devil." Why do Paul (in Ephesians 6) and Peter (1 Peter 5:9) use the same word (*anthistemi*) in speaking about our attitude and behavior in relation to this spiritual enemy? The word literally means "stand against." The prefix

'anti' makes it a negative word. If active resistance of Satan is not necessary, why not simply state the positive approach?

Some argue that because there are not clear teaching passages on the subject, we cannot find truth in a larger biblical context and by implication. If that were true, why are there no didactic passages on the Trinity or on personal evangelism? Why do we build a whole doctrine of the millennium on one passage found in apocalyptic literature, a genre known for its metaphorical nature?

While we do not build doctrine on church history, the most reliable of the account of the early practice of the church, *Apostolic Tradition*, preserved by Hippolytus of Rome, indicates that new Christians were all taken through a kind of deliverance since they were coming out of Satan's kingdom. (See Clinton Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, Baker, 1997, chapter 2.) Many later writers speak of the ability of Christians to cast out demons (Justin Martyr, Tatian, Tertullian, Origen), and Clinton Arnold says, "It appears that the primary context for the casting out of evil spirits was in the classes for new Christians" (Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions*, p. 107). Justin Martyr uses his ability to deal with demons as an argument in his argument for Christianity and against heresy.

Both the Scriptures and the witness of church history indicate that Christians can bring areas of bondage with them into the Christian life and that through sin they can give Satan a "place" (foothold, NIV) in their lives. They are therefore consistently told to resist the devil. The evidence from the early church indicates that they saw this as an active, verbal resistance involving the authority of the believer over our spiritual enemy.

Conclusion

The spiritual conflict in which we are engaged is a real battle, a battle we are involved in whether we want to be or not. Since we can live to the glory of God, Satan has to do whatever he can to keep that from happening. He does not come dressed in his Satan suit very often. He usually comes with one of his many disguises so that we do not even recognize that we are dealing with a spiritual enemy. This is the nature of deception. It is what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 11:3 when he said, "I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." That battle is winnable, but it is won only when we choose the path of truth (Psalm 119:30).