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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

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Chapter Thirty-One

Modern Myths About Spiritual Warfare, Part 2

We continue this chapter by considering additional erroneous but popular teachings regarding Satan and spiritual warfare. At the conclusion, we will consider what Scripture actually says in regard to spiritual warfare that every believer should practice.

Myth #5: “We can pull down demonic strongholds in the atmosphere through spiritual warfare.”

There is, according to Scripture, no doubt that Satan rules over a hierarchy of evil spirits who inhabit the earth’s atmosphere and who assist him in ruling the kingdom of darkness. That those evil spirits are “territorial,” ruling over certain geographical areas, is a concept that is also contained in the Bible (see Dan. 10:13, 20-21; Mark 5:9-10). That Christians have the authority to cast demons out of other people and the responsibility to resist the devil is scriptural (see Mark 16:17; Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). But can Christians pull down evil spirits over cities? The answer is that they can’t, and to attempt to do so is a waste of their time.

Just because we can cast demons out of people, we should not assume that we can pull down evil spirits over cities. There are numerous examples of casting demons out of people in the Gospels and the book of Acts, but can you think of even one example in the Gospels or the book of Acts where someone pulled down an evil spirit that was ruling over a city or geographical area? You can’t because there are no such examples. Can you think of one instruction anywhere in the epistles about our responsibility to pull down evil spirits from the atmosphere? No, because there are none. For this reason, we have no biblical basis to believe that we can or should be waging “spiritual warfare” against evil spirits in the atmosphere.

Pushing Parables Too Far

Reading more meaning into the Bible than God intended is an error Christians often make when they read scripture passages containing metaphorical language. A classic example of misinterpreting metaphorical language is how many interpret Paul’s words about “pulling down strongholds”:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete (2 Cor. 10:3-6).

The *King James Version*, rather than saying “we are destroying speculations,” says we are “pulling down strongholds.” From this one metaphorical phrase, practically an entire theology has been built to defend the idea of doing “spiritual warfare” in order to “pull down the strongholds” consisting of evil spirits in the atmosphere. But as the *New American Standard Version* clearly conveys, Paul is speaking, not of evil spirits in the atmosphere, but of strongholds of false beliefs that exist in people’s minds. *Speculations* are what Paul was destroying, not wicked spirits in high places.

This becomes even clearer as we read contextually. Paul said, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against *the knowledge of God*, and we are taking every *thought* captive to the obedience of Christ” (emphasis added). The battle of which Paul symbolically writes is a battle against thoughts, or ideas, that are contrary to the true knowledge of God.

Using military metaphors, Paul explains that we are in a battle, a battle for the minds of people who have believed the lies of Satan. Our primary weapon in this battle is the truth, which is why we’ve been commanded to go into the entire world and preach the gospel, invading enemy territory with a message that can set captives free. The fortresses we are destroying have been built with bricks of lies joined by the mortar of deception.

The Whole Armor of God

Another passage in Paul’s writings that is often misinterpreted is found in Ephesians 6:10-17, where he wrote about our responsibility to put on God’s armor. Although this passage is definitely about the Christian’s struggle with the devil and evil spirits, there is no mention of pulling down evil spirits over cities. As we study the passage closely, it becomes clear that Paul was primarily writing about each individual’s responsibility to resist Satan’s schemes in his personal life by applying the truth of God’s Word.

As we read this particular passage, notice also the evident metaphorical language. Paul was obviously not speaking of a literal, material armor that Christians should put on their bodies. Rather, the armor of which he wrote is figurative. Those pieces of armor represent the various scriptural truths that Christians should use for protection against the devil and evil spirits. By knowing, believing, and acting upon God’s Word, Christians are, figuratively speaking, clothed in God’s protective armor.

Let’s examine this passage in Ephesians verse by verse, while asking ourselves, *What was Paul really trying to convey to us?*

The Source of Our Spiritual Strength

First, we are told to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10). The emphasis is on the fact that we should *not* derive our strength from ourselves but God. This is further brought out in Paul’s next statement: “Put on the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:11a). This is *God’s* armor, not ours. Paul is not saying that God Himself wears armor, but that we need the armor that God has supplied for us.

Why do we need this armor that God has supplied? The answer is, “That you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11b). This armor is primarily

for *defensive*, not offensive use. It is not so we can go out and pull down evil spirits over cities; it is so we can *stand firm against* Satan's schemes.

We learn that the devil has evil plans to attack us, and unless we are wearing the armor that God supplies, we are vulnerable. Notice also that it is *our* responsibility to put on the armor, not God's.

Let's continue:

For 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 (Eph. 6:12).

Here it becomes crystal clear that Paul is not talking about a physical, material battle, but a spiritual one. We are struggling against the schemes of various ranks of evil spirits whom Paul lists. Most readers assume that Paul listed those evil spirits as they are ranked from bottom to top, "rulers" being the lowest class and "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" being the highest class.

How can we struggle against spiritual beings? That question can be answered by asking, *How can spiritual beings attack us?* They attack us primarily with temptations, thoughts, suggestions, and ideas that contradict God's Word and will. Therefore, our defense is knowing, believing, and obeying God's Word.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm (Eph. 6:13).

Notice, once again, that Paul's purpose is to equip us to *resist* and *stand* against Satan's attacks. His purpose is not to equip us to go out and attack Satan and pull down evil spirits from the atmosphere. Three times in this passage Paul tells us to *stand firm*. Our position is one of defense, not offense.

Truth—Our Primary Defense

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth (Eph. 6:14a).

Here is what keeps our armor in place—the truth. What is the truth? Jesus said to His Father, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). We cannot successfully stand firm against Satan unless we know the truth with which we can counter his lies. Jesus beautifully demonstrated this during His temptation in the wilderness as He responded to Satan's every suggestion with, "It is written."

Paul continued:

And having put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph. 6:14b).

As Christians, we should be familiar with two kinds of righteousness. First, we have been given, as a gift, the righteousness of Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:21). His righteous standing has been imputed to those who believe in Jesus, who bore their sins on the cross. That righteous standing has delivered us from Satan's dominion.

Second, we should be living righteously, obeying Jesus' commands, and that is probably what Paul had in mind regarding the breastplate of righteousness. By obedience to Christ, we give no place to the devil (see Eph. 4:26-27).

Firm Footing in Gospel Shoes

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

Knowing, believing and acting upon the truth of *the gospel* gives us firm footing to stand against Satan's attacks. The shoes that Roman soldiers wore had spikes on the bottom that gave them a firm grip on the battlefield. When Jesus is our Lord, we have firm footing to stand against Satan's lies

In addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one (Eph. 6:16).

Notice again Paul's emphasis here on our defensive posture. He is not talking about our pulling down demons over cities. He is talking about our using faith in God's Word to resist the devil's lies. When we believe and act upon what God has said, it is like having a shield that protects us from Satan's lies, represented figuratively as the "flaming missiles of the evil one."

Our Spiritual Sword—God's Word

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17).

Salvation, as the Bible describes it, includes our deliverance from Satan's captivity. God has "delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). Knowing this is like having a helmet that guards our minds from believing Satan's lie that we are still under his dominion. Satan is no longer our master—Jesus is.

Additionally, we are to take "the sword of the Spirit" which, as Paul explains, is figurative for the Word of God. As I already mentioned, Jesus was the perfect example of a spiritual warrior who skillfully yielded His spiritual sword. During His temptation in the wilderness He responded to Satan each time by quoting directly from God's Word. So too, if we are to defeat the devil in spiritual combat, we must know and believe what God has said, lest we fall for his lies.

Also notice that *Jesus* used "the sword of the Spirit" *defensively*. Some like to point out, to those of us who maintain that the armor of which Paul wrote is primarily defensive, that a sword is definitely an offensive weapon. Thus, with a very weak argument, they try to justify their theory that this passage in Ephesians 6:10-12 is applicable to our supposed responsibility to offensively "pull down strongholds" of evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Obviously, from reading Paul's own reason why Christians should put on God's armor (that they may "stand firm against the schemes of the devil"), we know that he is speaking primarily of a defensive use of the armor. Additionally, although a sword can be thought of as an offensive weapon, it can also be thought of as defensive, as it blocks and protects from the thrusts of the opponent's sword.

Moreover, we must be careful that we don't strain the entire metaphor, as we attempt to wrench from the various pieces of armor significance that really doesn't exist. When we begin to argue about the defensive and offensive nature of a sword, we are very likely "pushing the parable too far" as we carve into pieces a simple metaphor that was never meant to be so dissected.

But Didn't Jesus Instruct Us to "Bind the Strong Man"?

Three times in the Gospels we find Jesus making mention of "binding the strong man." In none of those three cases, however, did He tell His followers that "binding the strong man" was something they should practice. Let's examine exactly what Jesus did say, and let's read what He said contextually:

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! *But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.* Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:23-30, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus was not teaching His followers to bind any strong men. Rather, He was responding to the criticism of the Jerusalem scribes with unassailable logic and a clear metaphor.

They accused Him of casting out demons by using demonic power. He responded by saying that Satan would be insane to work against himself. No one can intelligently argue with that.

If it wasn't Satan's power that Jesus used to cast out demons, then whose power was He using? It had to be a power stronger than Satan's. It had to be *God's* power, the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus Jesus spoke metaphorically of Satan, comparing him to a strong man guarding his possessions. The only one able to take the strong man's possessions would be someone even stronger, namely, Himself. This was the true explanation as to how He cast out demons.

This passage that mentions the strong man, as well as the similar ones found in Matthew and Luke, cannot be used to justify our "binding strong men" over cities. Additionally, when we examine the rest of the New Testament, we do not find any examples of anyone "binding strong men" over cities, or any instruction for anyone to do so. We can thus safely conclude that it is unscriptural for any Christian to attempt to bind and render powerless some supposed "strong man-evil spirit" over a city or geographic area.

What About "Binding on Earth and in Heaven"?

Only twice in the Gospels do we find Jesus' words, "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be [or 'have been'] bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be [or 'have been'] loosed in heaven." Both instances are recorded in Matthew's gospel.

Was Jesus teaching us that we can and should "bind" demonic spirits in the atmosphere?

First, let's consider His words, *binding* and *loosing*. Jesus' use of those words is obviously figurative, as He certainly did not mean that His followers would be taking physical ropes or cords and literally binding anything or literally loosing anything that was bound with physical ropes or cords. So what did Jesus mean?

For the answer, we should look at His use of the words *binding* and *loosing* within the context of whatever He was speaking of at the time. Was He talking on the subject of evil spirits? If so, we could conclude that His words about binding have application to the binding of evil spirits.

Let's examine the first passage where Jesus mentioned binding and loosing:

He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and *whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.* (Matt. 16:15-19, emphasis added).

No doubt the reason this passage has been interpreted in so many ways is that it contains at least five metaphorical expressions: (1) "flesh and blood," (2) "rock," (3) "gates of Hades," (4) "keys of the kingdom of heaven," and (5) "binding/loosing." All of these expressions are figurative, speaking of something else.

Hades' Gates

Regardless of the precise meaning of the metaphors, you can see that, in this passage, Jesus did not mention evil spirits. The closest He came was His mention of the "gates of Hades," which are of course symbolic, as there is no way that the literal gates of Hades could do anything to hinder the church.

What do the "gates of Hades" represent? Perhaps they are symbolic of Satan's power, and Jesus meant that Satan's power would not stop His church from being built. Or, perhaps Jesus meant that the church He would build would save people from the fate of being imprisoned behind Hades' gates.

Notice that Jesus actually made reference to two sets of gates: the gates of Hades, and the gates to heaven, implied by His giving Peter the "keys to heaven." This contrast further supports that idea that Jesus' statement about Hades' gates is representative of the church's role in saving people from going to Hades.

Even if Jesus did mean that "all the power of Satan would not stop His church," we cannot jump to the conclusion that His comments about binding and loosing are instructions as to what we should be doing with evil spirits over cities, for the simple reason that we can find no examples in the Gospels or Acts of anyone binding evil spirits over cities, nor can we find any instructions in the epistles for doing such a thing. However we interpret Christ's words about binding and loosing, our interpretation must be supported contextually within the rest of the New Testament.

In light of the absence of *any* scriptural example, it is amazing how often Christians say such things as, "I bind the devil in Jesus name," or "I loose the angels over that person" and so on. You don't find anyone saying such things anywhere in the New Testament. The emphasis in Acts and the epistles is not on speaking to the devil or binding and loosing evil spirits, but on preaching the gospel and praying to God. For example, when Paul was being continually buffeted by a messenger (literally, "angel") of Satan, he didn't try to "bind" it. He prayed to God about it (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

The Keys to Heaven

Let's look further at the immediate context of Jesus' words about binding and loosing. Note that directly before He mentioned binding and loosing, Jesus said that He would give Peter the "keys to the kingdom of heaven." Peter was never given any literal keys to heaven's gates, and so Jesus' words must be taken as being figurative. What do "keys" represent? Keys represent *the means of access to something that is locked*. One who has the keys has means that others do not have to open certain doors.

As we consider Peter's ministry as reported in the book of Acts, what is it that we find him doing that could be considered comparable to opening doors that are locked to others?

Primarily, we find him proclaiming the gospel, the gospel that opens heaven's doors for all who will believe (and the gospel which shuts the gates of Hades). In that sense, all of us have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, as we are all Christ's ambassadors. *The keys to the kingdom of heaven can only be the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that can open heaven's gates.*

And Now, Binding and Loosing

Finally, after promising to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus made His statement about binding and loosing, His fifth figurative expression in the passage under consideration.

Within the context of the statements we've already examined, what did Jesus mean? How does Peter's binding and loosing have application to Jesus building His church, to the saving of people from Hades, and to proclaiming the gospel?

There is really only one possibility. Jesus simply meant, "I'm authorizing you as heaven's representative. Fulfill your responsibility on earth, and heaven will back you up."

If an employer said to his salesman, "Whatever you do in Bangkok will be done in the home office," how would that salesman interpret his boss's words? He would take them to mean that he was authorized to represent his company in Bangkok. All that Jesus meant was that Peter, on earth, was authorized to represent God in heaven. This promise to Peter would be a buttress to his confidence when he began proclaiming God's message in Jerusalem under the critical eye of the scribes and Pharisees—people who thought that they were God's authorized representatives, and people whom Peter would have previously revered as such.

This particular interpretation of Jesus' words harmonizes well with His second use of the same expression, found two chapters after the first passage in Matthew's gospel:

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, *whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst (Matt. 18:15-20, emphasis added).

In this second passage that mentions binding and loosing, there is absolutely *nothing* within the text that would lead us to believe that Jesus was speaking of binding evil

spirits. Here Christ spoke of binding and loosing directly after speaking on the subject of church discipline.

This would seem to indicate that in reference to binding and loosing in this passage, Jesus meant something like, "I'm giving *you* responsibility to determine who should be in the church and who should not. It is your job. As you fulfill your responsibilities, heaven will back you up."

In a broader application, Jesus was simply saying, "You are authorized on earth as heaven's representatives. You have responsibilities, and as you fulfill your responsibilities on earth, heaven will always support you."

Binding and Loosing in Context

This interpretation fits well within the immediate context as well as the wider context of the rest of the New Testament.

In regard to the immediate context, we note that directly after His statement about binding and loosing, Jesus said: "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree *on earth* about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is *in heaven*" (Matt. 18:19; emphasis added).

There again is the theme of "what you do on earth will be supported in heaven." We on earth are authorized and responsible to pray. When we do, heaven will respond. Jesus' words, "Again I say..." seem to indicate He is expanding upon His prior statement about binding and loosing.

Jesus' final statement in this passage, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst," also supports the "heaven will back you up" theme. When believers gather in His name, He who lives in heaven shows up.

Even if you totally disagree with my interpretation of the passages in consideration, you are going to be hard pressed to present a sound, scriptural argument that Jesus was speaking about binding evil spirits over cities!

God's Divine Plan Includes Satan

Satan and his angels are a rebel army, but not an army that is beyond God's control. This rebel army was *created by God*, (although they were not rebellious when first created). Paul wrote:

For by Him [Christ] all things were created, both *in the heavens* and on earth, visible and *invisible*, whether *thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*—all things have been created by Him and for Him (Col. 1:16, emphasis added).

Jesus created every angelic spirit of every rank, including Satan. Did He know that some would rebel? Of course He did. Then why did He create them? Because He would use those rebel spirits to help fulfill His plan. If He had no purpose for them, He would simply have incarcerated them, as we are told He has already done with some rebellious angels (see 2 Pet. 2:4) and as He will one day do with Satan (see Rev. 20:2).

God has reasons for allowing Satan and every evil spirit to operate upon the earth. If He didn't, they would be completely out of commission. What are God's reasons for allowing Satan to operate upon the earth? I don't think anyone understands every reason, yet God has revealed some of the reasons in His Word.

First, God allows Satan to operate limitedly on the earth to fulfill His plan to test humans. Satan serves as the alternate choice for humanity's allegiance. Whether they realize it or not, people are in subjection either to God or Satan. God permitted Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, two people who possessed God-given free wills, in order to test

them. All those with free wills must be tested to reveal what is in their hearts, either obedience or disobedience.¹

Second, God allows Satan to operate limitedly on the earth as an agent of His wrath upon evildoers. I have already previously proved this by showing several specific instances in Scripture when God brought judgment upon deserving people through evil spirits. Just the fact that God has allowed Satan to rule over the unsaved people of the world is an indication of His wrath upon them. God judges groups of evil people by allowing wicked humans to rule over them, and also by allowing wicked spiritual beings to rule over them, making their lives all the more miserable.

Third, God allows Satan to operate limitedly on the earth to glorify Himself. “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Every time God destroys one of Satan’s works, it glorifies His power and wisdom.

Jesus is the Head Over Principalities and Powers

As Christians, our scriptural responsibility to deal with Satan and evil spirits is two-fold: to resist them in our own lives (Jas. 4:7), and to cast them out of others who want to be delivered (Mark 16:17). Any Christian who has experience in casting demons out of other people knows that, as a general rule, unless the demonized person wants to be delivered, he will be unable to cast the demon out.² God honors every person’s free will, and if a person wants to yield to evil spirits, God won’t stop him.

This is yet another reason why we can’t pull down territorial spirits over geographic areas. Those evil spirits are there holding people in bondage because that is what those people have chosen. Through proclaiming the gospel to them, we offer them a choice. If they make the right choice, it will result in their freedom from Satan and evil spirits. But if they make the wrong choice, choosing not to repent, God will allow Satan to hold them captive.

Jesus is spoken of in Scripture as being “the head over all rule and authority” (Col. 2:10). Although the Greek words for *rule* (*arche*) and *authority* (*exousia*) are sometimes used in describing human political leaders, they are also used in the New Testament as titles for demonic spiritual rulers. The classic passage about the Christian’s struggle against rulers (*arche*) and powers (*exousia*) in Ephesians 6:12 is one example.

When we read contextually what Paul wrote about Jesus being the head over all rule and authority in Colossians 2:10, it seems clear that he is speaking of spiritual powers. For example, in the same passage just four verses later, Paul writes of Jesus, “When He had disarmed the *rulers* and *authorities*, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Col. 2:15).

If Jesus is the head of the spiritual rulers and authorities, then He is sovereign over them. This is a wonderful revelation to Christians living in pagan, animistic cultures, who spent their former lives worshipping idols in fear of the evil spirits whom they knew ruled over them.

The Only Way of Escape

The only way to escape the captivity of evil spirits is to repent and believe the gospel. That is the escape God has provided. No one can bind the demonic forces over a city and

¹ This concept is discussed much more thoroughly in my book, *God’s Tests*, available to read in English on our website, www.shepherdserve.org

² The exception to this rule would be in cases of people who are so controlled by demons that they have no way of communicating their desire for freedom. In those cases, special gifts of the Spirit would be necessary to bring deliverance, and gifts of the Spirit operate as the Spirit wills.

set you free or set you partially free. Until a person repents and believes the gospel, He is abiding in God's wrath (see John 3:36), which includes being held by demonic powers.

That is why there are no measurable changes in the cities where the big spiritual warfare conferences and sessions have taken place, because nothing has happened that has really affected the demonic hierarchies that rule in those areas. Christians can scream at principalities and powers all day and night; they can attempt to torment the devil by so-called "warring tongues"; they can say "I bind you evil spirits over this city" a million times; they can even do all these things up in airplanes and on the top floors of skyscrapers (as some actually do); and the only way the evil spirits will be affected is that they will get a good laugh at the foolish Christians.

Let's proceed to a sixth modern myth about spiritual warfare.

Myth #6: "Spiritual warfare against territorial spirits opens the door for effective evangelism."

The driving motivation for many Christians who are heavily involved in doing spiritual warfare against territorial spirits is their desire to see God's kingdom expanded. For this they are to be commended. Every Christian should desire to see more people escape from Satan's grasp.

It is important, however, that we use God's methods to build God's kingdom. God knows what works and what is a waste of time. He has told us exactly what our responsibilities are in regard to the expansion of His kingdom. To think we can do something not found in Scripture that will multiply the effectiveness of our evangelism, something that Jesus, Peter, or Paul never practiced in their ministries, is foolish.

Why do so many Christians think that spiritual warfare can open the door to effective evangelism? Their line of reasoning usually sounds something like this: "Satan has blinded the minds of unsaved people. We must therefore do spiritual warfare against Satan to stop him from blinding them. Once the blinders are removed, more people will believe the gospel." Is this true?

There is certainly no doubt that Satan has blinded the minds of unsaved people. Paul wrote:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

The question is, *Did Paul give this piece of information to the Corinthian Christians with the intent of motivating them to do spiritual warfare and pull down territorial spirits so that unsaved people would become more receptive?*

The answer is *No* for several obvious reasons.

First, because Paul did not go on to say, "Therefore Corinthians, because Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers, I want you to do spiritual warfare and pull down territorial spirits so those blinders will be removed." Rather, the very next thing he mentioned was his preaching of Christ, which *is* the way that spiritual blindness *is* removed.

Second, in *none* of his letters did Paul instruct any believers to be involved in pulling down strongholds over their cities that evangelistic results might increase.

Third, we know from reading all of Paul's letters that he did not believe Satan's blinding was the *primary* reason why unbelievers remained unbelieving. Satan's blinding is a contributing factor, but not the main or only factor. *The primary factor that keeps people unsaved is the hardness of their hearts.* This is obvious for the simple reason that Satan is not able to keep everyone blinded. Some people, when they hear the truth,

believe it, and thus reject any lies they formerly believed. It is not so much Satan's blinding that causes their unbelief, as it is their unbelief that allows Satan's blinding.

Callous Hearts

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul explained precisely why non-Christians remain in unbelief:

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being *darkened in their understanding* [perhaps a reference to Satan's blinding], excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, *because of the hardness of their heart*; and they, having become *callous*, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph. 4:17-19, emphasis added).

Paul said that the unsaved are excluded from the life of God because of "the ignorance that is in them." But why are they ignorant? Why has their "understanding been darkened"? The answer is, "because of the hardness of their hearts." They have become "callous." That is the root and primary reason why people remain unsaved.³ They bear the blame themselves. Satan only supplies the lies they want to believe.

Jesus' parable of the sower and the soils illustrates this concept perfectly:

The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up....Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved (Luke 8:5, 11-12).

Notice that the seed, which represents the gospel, fell beside the road and was trampled. It couldn't penetrate the hard soil where people frequently walked. Thus it was easy for birds, which represent the devil, to steal the seeds.

The point of the entire parable is to compare the condition of people's hearts (and their receptivity to God's Word) with various types of soil. Jesus was explaining why some people believe and why others do not: It all depends upon them.

How does Satan figure into the picture? He is only able to steal the Word from those with hardened hearts. The birds in the parable were only a secondary cause as to why the seeds did not germinate. The primary problem was with the soil; in fact, it was the soil's hardness that made it possible for the birds to get the seeds.

The same thing is true with the gospel. The real problem is with the hardened hearts of free moral agents. When people reject the gospel, they make a choice to remain blinded. They would prefer to believe lies rather than the truth. As Jesus put it, "The light is come into the world, and *men loved the darkness* rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19, emphasis added).

The Bible does not lead us to believe that people are sincere, good-hearted folks, who would surely believe the gospel if Satan would only stop blinding them. On the contrary, the Bible paints a very dim picture of human character, and God will hold every individual responsible for his sinful choices. Sitting on His throne of judgment, God will not accept anyone's excuse that "the devil made me do it."

³ Paul's description of unbelievers in Romans 1:18-32 also supports this same concept.

How Satan Blinds People's Minds

Exactly how does Satan blind people's minds? Does he possess some mystical spiritual power that he pours like a potion into people's heads to dull their understanding? Does a demon dig its talons into their brains, effectively short-circuiting their rational thinking processes? No, Satan blinds people's minds *by supplying them with lies to believe*.

Obviously, if people really believed the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who died for their sins, if they really believed that they will one day have to stand before Him to give an account of their lives, then they would repent and become His followers. But they don't believe those things. They do, however, believe *something*. They may believe that there is no God, or that there is no life after death. They may believe in reincarnation, or that God would never send anyone to hell. They may think that their religious works will get them into heaven. But whatever they believe, if it is not the gospel, it can be summed up in one word: *lies*. They don't believe the truth, and thus Satan keeps them blinded through lies. If, however, they humble themselves and believe the truth, Satan will not be able to blind them any longer.

The Lies of Darkness

Satan's kingdom is referred to in Scripture as the "domain of *darkness*" (Col. 1:13). Darkness, of course, represents the absence of truth—the absence of light or enlightenment. When you are in darkness, you navigate by your imagination and usually end up being hurt. That is how it is in Satan's kingdom of darkness. Those who are in it are navigating their lives by their imaginations, and their imaginations have been filled with Satan's lies. They are in spiritual darkness.

Satan's kingdom is best defined then, not as a geographical kingdom with clearly defined borders, but as a kingdom of belief—belief, that is, in lies. The kingdom of darkness is located in the same place as the kingdom of light. Those who believe the truth live right among those who believe lies.⁴ Our primary job is to proclaim the truth to people who already believe lies. When someone believes the truth, Satan loses another one of his subjects because he is no longer able to deceive him.

Thus we set unsaved people free from Satan, not by "binding" evil spirits over them but by proclaiming the truth. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and *the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32, emphasis added). Spiritual blindness is removed by truth.

Within that same passage of Scripture in John's Gospel, Jesus said to an unsaved audience:

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies*. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me (John 8:44-45, emphasis added).

Notice the contrast Jesus made between Himself and the devil. He speaks the truth; Satan is the ultimate liar.

Notice also that even though Jesus told His listeners that they were of their father the devil, and even though He exposed Satan as a liar, He still placed responsibility on them to believe the truth He spoke. It was not the devil's fault that they were blinded—it was

⁴ It is true, of course, that in various geographical areas, there are greater or lesser percentages of people in either kingdom.

their own fault. *Jesus held them responsible.* Satan assists people who “love darkness” to stay in the darkness by supplying them with lies to believe. But Satan can’t fool anyone who will believe the truth.

All this being so, the primary way we can push back the kingdom of darkness is by spreading the light—the truth of God’s Word. That is why Jesus did *not* tell us, “Go into all the world and bind the devil” but rather, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.” Jesus told Paul that the purpose of his preaching would be to open people’s “eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18, emphasis added). This makes it clear that people escape Satan’s dominion when they are exposed to the truth of the gospel and then make a decision to turn from darkness to light, believing the truth rather than a lie. The only strongholds we are “pulling down” are strongholds of lies built in people’s minds.

This is God’s Plan

Don’t forget that God is the one who cast Satan out of heaven to the earth. He could have put Satan anywhere in the universe or incarcerated him forever. But He didn’t. Why? Because God wanted to use Satan to accomplish His ultimate goal—the goal one day to have a big family of free moral agents who would love Him, having chosen to serve Him.

If God wanted a family of children who would love Him, then two things were required. First, He had to create people with free wills, because the foundation of love is free will. Robots and machines can’t love.

Second, He had to test them in an environment where they would be faced with a choice to obey or disobey, to love or hate Him. Free moral agents *must* be tested. *And if there is going to be a test of loyalty, there must exist a temptation to disloyalty.* Thus, we begin to understand why God placed Satan on the earth. Satan would serve as the alternate choice for humanity’s allegiance. He would be permitted (with certain limitations) to influence anyone who was receptive to his lies. Everyone would be faced with the choice: *Will I believe God or Satan? Will I serve God or Satan?* Whether people realize it or not, they have all made a decision already. Our job is to encourage people who have made the wrong decision to repent and believe the gospel, making the right decision.

Is this not what happened in the Garden of Eden? God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there and then forbade Adam and Eve to eat from it. If God didn’t want them to eat from it, why did He place it there? The answer is that it served as a test.

We also note that Satan was permitted by God to tempt Eve. Again, if loyalty is to be tested, there must exist the temptation to be disloyal. Satan lied to Eve and she believed him, and so at the same time, she decided *not* to believe what God had said. The result? The first free moral agents revealed the disloyalty that was in their hearts.

In a similar manner, every free moral agent is tested throughout his or her lifetime. God has revealed Himself through His creation, and so everyone can see that there is an awesome God who exists (see Rom. 1:19-20). God has given every one of us a conscience, and in our hearts, we know right from wrong (see Rom. 2:14-16). Satan and his evil spirits are permitted, in a limited manner, to lie to and tempt people. The result is that every free moral agent is tested.

The sad truth of the matter is that every free moral agent has rebelled and “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). We can thank God, however, that He has provided a ransom for our sins and a way to be born into His family. Jesus’ sacrificial death is the only and all-sufficient answer to our problem.

Satan's Deception, Now and Later

So we understand at least one reason why the devil and his rebel army are permitted to work on this planet: for the purpose of deceiving those who love darkness.

This truth is further validated when we consider that according to the book of Revelation, Satan will one day be bound by an angel and incarcerated for a thousand years. The reason for his incarceration? "That he should not deceive the nations any longer" (Rev. 20:3). During that Millennium, Jesus will personally rule the world from Jerusalem.

But after those thousand years, Satan will be released for a short period of time. The result? He "will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth" (Rev. 20:8).

If God doesn't want Satan to deceive people at that time, why will He release him? Especially in light of the fact that God originally incarcerated Satan "that he should not deceive the nations any longer"?

God, of course, would prefer that Satan never deceive anyone. But He knows that the only people whom Satan can deceive are those who don't believe what He Himself has said. Satan can only deceive those who reject the truth, and that is why God permits him to operate now, and why He will permit Satan to operate then. As Satan deceives people, the condition of people's hearts is made apparent, and then God can sort the "wheat from the tares" (see Matt. 13:24-30).

This is exactly what will happen at the end of the Millennium when Satan is released. He will deceive all those who love darkness, and they will then gather their armies around Jerusalem in an attempt to overthrow Christ's rule. God will know exactly who loves Him and who hates Him, and thus He will immediately send "fire from heaven" that will "devour them" (Rev. 20:10). Satan will serve God's purposes then just as he does now. For this reason among others, it is foolish to think that we can "pull down territorial spirits." God allows them to operate for His own reasons.

Biblical Evangelism

The plain fact is that neither Jesus nor any of the New Testament apostles practiced the kind of spiritual warfare that some are claiming is the missing key to effective evangelism today. We never find Jesus, Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, or Paul "pulling down strongholds" or "binding the strong men" over the cities in which they preached. Rather, we find that they followed the Holy Spirit in regard to where He wanted them to preach; we find them proclaiming the simple gospel—calling people to repentance and faith in Christ—and we find them enjoying marvelous results. And in those cases where they preached to unreceptive people who rejected the gospel, we don't find them "doing spiritual warfare so that Satan wouldn't be able to continue blinding their minds." Rather, we find them "shaking the dust off their feet" as Jesus commanded and going to the next city (see Matt. 10:14; Acts 13:5).

It is amazing that anyone could claim that "pulling down strongholds" and "binding the strong men" is a prerequisite to successful evangelism when there are so many thousands of examples of great revivals in church history where such "spiritual warfare" was never practiced.

"But our techniques work!" someone will say. "Since we started doing this kind of spiritual warfare, more people have been getting saved than ever before."

If that is true, I'll tell you why. It is because there has been more scriptural prayer and evangelism done at the same time, or because a group of people has suddenly become more receptive to the gospel.

What would you say if an evangelist told you, "Tonight, before I preached at the revival service, I privately ate three bananas. And when I preached, sixteen people were

saved! I've finally found the secret to effective evangelism! From now on, I'm going to make sure I eat three bananas before I preach!"?

Surely you would say to that evangelist, "Your eating three bananas had nothing to do with those sixteen people being saved. The key to your success is that you preached the gospel, and there were sixteen people listening who were receptive."

God honors His Word. If God gives a promise, and someone meets the conditions to that particular promise, God will keep His promise, even if that person is doing other things that are unscriptural.

This is true with the present spiritual warfare practices. If you start passing out tracts and "binding the strong man" over your city, a certain percentage of people will be saved. And if you just start passing out tracts without binding the strong man, the same percentage of people will be saved.

How to Pray Scripturally for a Spiritual Harvest

How should we pray for unsaved people? First, we should understand that there is no instruction in the New Testament that tells us to pray that God will save people, nor is there any record of any early Christians praying that way. The reason is because from God's standpoint, He has done everything He needs to do in order for everyone in the world to be saved. He so much desires for them to be saved that He gave His Son to die on the cross.

But why isn't everyone saved yet? Because not everyone has believed the gospel. And why have they not believed? There are only two reasons: (1) Either they have never yet heard the gospel, or (2) they've heard the gospel and rejected it.

That is why the scriptural way to pray for the unsaved is to pray that they will have opportunities to hear the gospel. For example, Jesus told us "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore *beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*" (Luke 10:2, emphasis added). In order for people to hear the gospel and be saved, someone has to tell them the gospel. That is why we should pray for God to send people to them.

When the early church prayed regarding a spiritual harvest, they prayed, "Grant that Thy bond-servants may *speak Thy word with all confidence*, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29-30, emphasis added).

They were asking either for (1) opportunities to proclaim the gospel boldly or (2) boldness to proclaim the gospel during the opportunities they knew they would have. They also expected God to confirm the gospel with healings, signs and wonders. Those are scriptural prayers, and notice the objective was to give people the opportunity to hear the gospel. God answered their prayer: "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

How did Paul think Christians should pray in regard to producing a spiritual harvest? Did he instruct them to ask God to save more people? No, let's read what he said:

Finally, brethren, *pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified*, just as it did also with you (2 Thes. 3:1, emphasis added).

Pray on my behalf, *that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an ambassador in chains; *that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly*, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:19-20, emphasis added).

Whether or not people are saved now depends more upon them than it does upon God, and so our prayers should be for people to hear the gospel and for God to help us proclaim it. God will answer our prayers, but that still doesn't guarantee that anyone will be saved, because God gives people the right to make their own choices. Their salvation depends on their response to the gospel.

Myth #7: "When a Christian sins, he opens the door for a demon to come and live in him."

It is true that when a Christian sins, it may be because he has yielded to temptation from an evil spirit. Yielding to the suggestion of an evil spirit, however, does not mean that the evil spirit himself is then able to come inside the believer. When we sin as Christians, we break our fellowship with God because we have disobeyed Him (see 1 John 1:5-6). We feel guilty. We have not, however, broken our *relationship* with Him, as we are still His children.

If we confess our sins, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Then our fellowship with Him is restored. Notice John did not say that we needed to be cleansed from any indwelling demons when we are guilty of sin.

Every Christian is faced with daily temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil. Paul wrote that we do indeed have a struggle against various evil spirits (see Eph 6:12). Therefore, to some degree, every believer is harassed by demon spirits. That is normal, and it is our responsibility to resist the devil and demons by faith in God's Word (see 1 Pet. 5:8-9). When we believe and act upon what God has said, that is resisting the devil.

For example, if Satan brings thoughts of depression, we should think on a scripture that counteracts depression, and obey God's Word to "rejoice always" (1 Thes. 5:16) and "give thanks in everything" (1 Thes. 5:18). It is our responsibility to act upon God's Word and replace Satan's thoughts with God's thoughts.

We must recognize that as free moral agents, we can think about whatever we want to think. If a believer continually *chooses* to listen and yield to the suggestions of evil spirits, he can certainly open his mind to being *oppressed*, which is simply a state of being more receptive to and more dominated by wrong thoughts. If he chooses to yield even more, he could become *obsessed* with a certain kind of wrong thinking, which is very rare for a Christian, but can occur. Yet even then, if the obsessed Christian desires to be free, all he needs to do is determine to think about and yield to God's Words and resist the devil.

But could he ever become *possessed*? Only if he willfully decided, from his heart, without being pressured, to reject Christ and turn His back upon Him completely. Then, of course, he would no longer be a Christian⁵ and thus potentially could become possessed—if he yielded himself all the more to the evil spirit that was oppressing him. But that is a far cry from the idea of opening the door for an evil spirit to inhabit you through committing one sin.

It is a fact that there is not a single example in the New Testament of any Christian being possessed by a demon. Nor is there any warning addressed to Christians about the dangerous possibility of their being inhabited by demons. Nor is there any instruction regarding how to cast out demons from fellow-Christians.

The truth is that as Christians, we don't need demons cast out of us—what we need is to have our minds renewed upon the Word of God. That is scriptural. Paul wrote:

⁵ Those who hold to the position of "once saved, always saved" will no doubt disagree. I would encourage them to read Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Phil. 3:18-19; Col. 1:21-23 and Heb. 3:12-14, paying special attention to the word "if" whenever it is found.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2).

Once our minds have been cleansed of old thinking patterns and been renewed with the truth of God's Word, we gain victory over sinful habits and live in a consistent Christ-like manner. The truth is what sets us free (John 8:32). We are transformed as we renew our minds, not as we have all the demons exorcised.

Why then are there so many Christians who testify that they have had a demon (or demons) cast out of them? One possibility is that they just imagined that they had a demon in them that has since been cast out. Many Christians are gullible and lack knowledge of God's Word, and so they are easy prey for "ministers of deliverance" who psychologically manipulate people into thinking they have demons. Once people are convinced they have a demon living in them, they will naturally cooperate with anyone who appears confident of his ability to exorcise the demon.

Another real possibility is that such people who have had demons cast out of them were not true believers in Christ at the time of their deliverance, even though they thought they were believers. The modern gospel, which stands in stark contrast to the biblical gospel, has deceived many into thinking they are Christians even though they are indistinguishable from non-Christians and Jesus is not their Lord. In Scripture, we find that when people believed the gospel and were born again, demons that lived in them automatically came out (see Acts 8:5-7). Demons can't possess people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit indwells all people who are born again.

Myth 8: "Through studying the history of a city, we can determine which evil spirits are dominating it, and thus be more effective in spiritual warfare and ultimately in evangelization."

This myth is based upon several ideas that cannot be supported by Scripture. One such idea is that territorial spirits stay around for a long time. That is, the ones that lived over a region hundreds of years ago are supposedly the ones still there. Thus, if we find that a city was founded by greedy people, we can then conclude that there are spirits of greed dominating the city today. If the city was once an old Indian village, we can conclude that spirits of shamanism and witchcraft dominate the city today. And on and on it goes.

But is it true that the same evil principalities and powers that lived over a geographical area hundreds of years ago are still there today? Perhaps, but not necessarily.

Consider the story we've previously considered from the tenth chapter of the book of Daniel. The unnamed angel who was assisted by Michael to fight "the prince of Persia" said to Daniel, "I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, *the prince of Greece is about to come*" (Dan. 10:20, emphasis added). History tells us that the Persian Empire fell to the Greeks through the conquests of Alexander the Great. Yet this unnamed angel was aware of imminent corresponding changes in the spiritual realm—the "prince of Greece" was coming.

When the prince of Greece did come, did he rule in the spiritual realm over the Greek Empire just as the prince of Persia ruled in the spiritual realm over the Persian Empire? That would seem to be a reasonable conclusion, and if so, then some high-ranking evil spirits changed geographical locations, as the Greek Empire included practically all the territory of the Persian Empire. When there are political changes on earth, there is a possibility that there are changes in the kingdom of darkness. The fact is, however, that we just don't know unless God would reveal it to us.

Regardless, it makes little difference what particular evil spirits are ruling over any given geographical area, as there is nothing we can do about it through “spiritual warfare,” as proven earlier.

Over-Categorizing Evil Spirits

Moreover, it is an assumption on our part to think that there are ruling spirits that specialize in specific sins. The whole concept of there being “spirits of greed,” “spirits of lust,” “religious spirits,” “spirits of strife,” and so on, cannot be supported by Scripture, much less the idea that those different kinds of spirits exist in the higher ranks of evil spirits who rule the kingdom of darkness.

Amazing as it is to those who have never studied the four Gospels closely, there are only three *specific* kinds of demons that Jesus cast out: Once a “dumb demon” is mentioned (Luke 11:14), once we read of a “deaf and dumb spirit” (Mark 9:25), and more than once we find reference to “unclean spirits,” which seem to include all demons that Jesus exorcised, including even the “deaf and dumb” one (see Mark 9:25).

Is it not possible that the “deaf and dumb spirit” was able to do something other than make someone deaf and dumb? There is no doubt it could, because it caused the boy of Mark 9 to have terrible seizures as well. Therefore “deaf and dumb” may not be a reference to the specific *type* of spirit it was but rather a simple reference as to *how it was harming* a certain individual. Some of us have become “category-crazy” when it comes to demons, going way beyond biblical revelation.

In the entire Old Testament, the only specific spirits that are named that could perhaps be considered specific evil spirits are a “deceiving spirit” (1 Kings 22:22-23), a “spirit of distortion” (Is. 19:14), and a “spirit of harlotry” (Hos. 4:12; 5:4). In regard to the first and the second, certainly all evil spirits could be referred to as “deceiving spirits” and “spirits of distortion.” In regard to the third, the phrase “spirit of harlotry” is not necessarily a reference to a specific evil spirit, but simply a prevailing attitude.⁶

In the whole book of Acts, the only time a specific evil spirit is mentioned is in Acts 16:16, where we read about a young girl who had a “spirit of divination.” And in all the epistles, the only kind of specific evil spirits that are mentioned are “deceitful spirits” (1 Tim. 4:1) which, again, could be a description of any evil spirit.

In light of the few references to specific kinds of demons in the Bible, it is amazing to read through some of the modern lists which contain hundreds of various kinds of demons that might inhabit people or control cities.

We should not assume there is any categorization, by specific sin, of any higher ranks of evil spirits. It is an assumption to say, “Because there is so much gambling in that city, there must be gambling spirits over it.”

Smoking Spirits?

Think how foolish someone would appear who said, “There must be many smoking spirits over that city, because so many people in that city smoke cigarettes.” What were those “smoking spirits” doing before those cities existed? Where were they then? What were they doing before tobacco was ever used for smoking? Is the reason fewer people are now smoking is because some of those old “smoking demons” are dying off or moving to new territories?

Do you see how foolish it is when we say such things as, “That city is controlled by spirits of lust, which is why there are so many houses of prostitution there”? The truth is

⁶ The “spirit of jealousy” spoken of in Numbers 5:14-30 and the “spirit of haughtiness” of Proverbs 16:18 are good examples of the word *spirit* being used to convey a certain kind of predominant attitude, rather than an actual demon. In Numbers 14:24 we read that Caleb had a “different spirit,” which is obviously referring to Caleb’s good attitude.

that wherever people are not serving Christ, there exists the kingdom of darkness. Many evil spirits operate in that dark realm who entice their subjects to sin and continue in their rebellion against God. Those spirits will tempt people in every area of sin, and in some places, people yield more to one sin than other sins. Their only hope is the gospel that we are called to proclaim.

Even if there were specific kinds of evil spirits who specialized in certain sins and who ruled certain geographical areas, it wouldn't help us to know about it, because there is nothing we can do to remove them. Our responsibility is to pray (in a scriptural manner) for the people there who are deceived and to preach the gospel to them.

The only good it would do to find out about the most predominate sins in a certain city would be so that we can preach more convicting messages to the unsaved living there—by specifically naming the sins that hold them guilty before God. But there is no need to research a city's history to determine that. One only needs to visit for a short while and keep his eyes and ears open. The predominant sins will soon become evident.

Finally, there is no example in the New Testament of anyone doing "spiritual mapping" as a means of preparing for spiritual warfare or evangelization. Nor are there any instructions in the epistles to do so. In the New Testament, the apostles followed the Holy Spirit in regard to where they should preach, faithfully proclaimed the gospel and called for people to repent, and relied upon the Lord to confirm the word with signs following. Their method worked quite well.

Myth 9: "Some Christians need to be set free from generational or satanic curses."

The whole of idea of "generational curses" is derived from four passages of Scripture found in the Old Testament that all say essentially the same thing. They are Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:8 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Let's consider Numbers 14:18:

The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations* (emphasis added).

How are we to interpret this passage of Scripture? Does it mean that God will put a curse on or punish someone for the sins of his parents, grandparents, great grandparents, or great, great grandparents? Are we to believe that God might forgive someone of his sins when he believes in Jesus but then punish that same person for his great-grandparents' sins?

Absolutely not, otherwise God could rightfully be accused of being grossly unjust and hypocritical. He Himself has stated that punishing someone for his parents' sins would be morally wrong:

"Yet you [the Israelites] say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' [God responds:] When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. *The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity;* the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Ezek. 18:19-20, emphasis added).

Moreover, under the Law of Moses, God commanded that neither father nor son should bear the punishment for the sins of the other:

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin (Deut. 24:16).

There is no possibility that a God of love and righteousness might curse or punish someone for his ancestor's sins.⁷ So then what does Scripture mean when it says that God will "by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations"?

It can only mean that God holds people responsible for the sinful example they set in front of their offspring, and He thus holds them partly responsible for the sins their offspring commit because of their influence. God holds people partly responsible, because of their evil influence, for the sins of their great grandchildren! That is how holy God is. And no one can say that He is unfair in doing so.

Notice that the passage under consideration states that God will "visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children." It is the iniquity of *fathers on their children* that is being visited.

Thus, the whole idea of "generational curses" is a superstition, and a bad one at that, as it makes God appear unrighteous.

Satanic Curses?

But what about "satanic curses"?

First, there is nothing in the entire Bible that indicates Satan is able to "put a curse" on anyone, nor are there any examples of his doing so. Certainly we find Satan afflicting people in the Bible, but never do we find him "putting a curse" on a family which then results in continual bad luck upon them and their successive generations.

Every Christian is harassed by Satan and evil spirits (to a limited extent) all of his life, but this does not mean that any of us need someone to "break a satanic curse" over us that has been passed down to us from our parents. What we need to do is stand on God's Word and resist the devil by faith, as we are told to do in the Scriptures (see 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

In the Bible, *God* is the one who has the power to bless and curse (see Gen. 3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 8:21; 12:3; Num. 23:8; Deut. 11:26; 28:20; 29:27; 30:7; 2 Chron. 34:24; Ps. 37:22; Prov. 3:33; 22:14; Lam. 3:65; Mal. 2:2; 4:6). Others may curse us with their mouths, but their curses are powerless to harm us:

Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, so a curse without cause does not alight (Prov. 26:2).

Balaam had it right when, after being hired by Balak to curse the children of Israel, he said, "How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce, whom the Lord has not denounced?" (Num. 23:8).

Some Christians have gone overboard on the idea of people placing curses on other people based on Jesus' words in Mark 11:23: "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him."

⁷ This is not to say that children don't suffer because of their parents' sins, because they often do. When they do, however, it is not an indication that God is punishing those children for their parents' sins, but an indication that people are so evil that they practice certain sins that they know will cause their own children to suffer. It is also clear from Scripture that God may mercifully withhold judgment on one individual that He may later pour out upon a subsequent and equally- or more-deserving offspring. Similarly, He might mercifully withhold His judgment upon a wicked generation yet pour it out upon a subsequent and equally- or more-deserving generation (see Jer. 16:11-12). That is much different than punishing a person for his grandparents' sins.

Notice, however, that there is no power in just speaking words, but rather in speaking words that are believed from the heart. There is no way a person could have faith that his curse against someone could actually bring harm to that person, because faith is a confident assurance (Heb. 11:1), and faith only comes from hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17). A person might *hope* his curse against someone will bring misfortune, but he could never *believe* it, because God has given no faith-supplying promise about cursing people.

The only exception to this would be if God gave someone "the gift of faith" along with a "gift of prophecy" (two of the nine gifts of the Spirit), that would be spoken in the form of a blessing or curse, as we see He occasionally did in the lives of some Old Testament characters (see Gen. 27:27-29, 38-41; 49:1-27; Josh. 6:26 with 1 Kin. 16:34; Judg. 9:7-20, 57; 2 Kin. 2:23-24). Even in those cases, the blessings or curses originated from *God*, not man. Thus, the whole idea of someone being able to "place a curse" on another person is just a superstition. This is why Jesus did not instruct us to "break curses that have been spoken against us," but rather to simply "bless those who curse us." We do not need to be afraid of any person's curses. To be afraid of someone's curse is to display a lack of faith in God. Unfortunately, I meet pastors all the time who seemingly have more faith in the power of Satan than the power of God. Although I travel to different countries every month doing a lot of damage to Satan's kingdom, I am not the least bit afraid of Satan or any curses being placed on me. There is no reason to be afraid.

Occult Curses?

Is it possible to have some satanic curse upon us because of past involvement in the occult?

We must not forget that when we are born again, we are delivered from Satan's power and the kingdom of darkness (see Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). Satan no longer has any hold on us unless we give it to him. Although the Bible indicates that the Ephesian Christians were heavily involved in practicing magic before their conversion (see Acts 19:18-19), there is no record of Paul breaking any "Satanic curses" or binding Satan's power over them after they were born again. The reason is because they were automatically set free from Satan's dominion the moment they first believed in Jesus.

Additionally, when Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, he gave no instructions regarding setting anyone free from generational or satanic curses. All he told them was "do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27), and to "put on the full armor of God" that they might "be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Those are every Christian's responsibilities.

But why, in some cases, have Christians apparently been helped when someone broke a "generational" or "satanic curse" over them? Possibly because the individual who needed help had faith that the devil would flee once the "curse" was broken. Faith is what puts the devil on the run, and every Christian can and should have faith that when he resists the devil, the devil will flee. There is no need, however, to call in a "deliverance specialist" in order to send Satan running.

Finally, the Bible tells us that Christ "became a *curse* for us," and in so doing, "redeemed us from the *curse* of the Law" (Gal 3:13, emphasis added). All of us were formerly under God's curse because we had sinned, but since Jesus bore our punishment, we have been released from that curse. Praise God! No longer cursed, we can rejoice that we have now been *blessed* "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Scriptural Spiritual Warfare

So we have covered many of the modern myths regarding spiritual warfare. But is there a form of spiritual warfare that is scriptural? Yes, and that will now be our focus.

Perhaps the first thing we need to know about spiritual warfare is that it should not be the focus of our Christian life. We should be focused on Christ, to follow and obey Him, as we progressively grow to be more like Him. Only a small percentage of the New Testament writings address the subject of spiritual warfare, indicating to us that it should be a minor focus in the Christian life.

The second thing we need to know about spiritual warfare is that the Bible tells us what we need to know. We don't need any special discernment (or a preacher who claims to have special discernment) into the "deep things of Satan." Biblical spiritual warfare is simple. Satan's schemes are clearly revealed in Scripture. Our responsibilities are straightforwardly outlined. Once you know and believe what God has said, you are guaranteed to be a winner in this spiritual struggle.

Back to the Beginning

Let's go back to the book of Genesis, where we are first introduced to the devil. In the first chapters there, Satan appears in the form of a serpent. If there is any doubt that this serpent is the devil, Revelation 20:2 removes it: "And he laid hold of the dragon, *the serpent of old*, who is the devil and Satan" (emphasis added).

Genesis 3:1 tells us, "The serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." When you think about how crafty some of God's creatures are as they compete to survive and stalk their prey, it makes you realize how cunning Satan must be. On the other hand, Satan is not all-knowing or all-wise as God is, and we should not assume that we are at a mental disadvantage in our struggle against him. Jesus instructed *us* to be as "shrewd as *serpents*" (Matt. 10:16, emphasis added). Paul claimed that he was not ignorant of Satan's schemes (see 2 Cor. 2:11) and that we have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16).

Satan launched his first-recorded fiery dart by questioning Eve about what God has said. Her response would reveal to him whether he had a chance of deceiving her into disobeying God. *Satan has no avenue to deceive anyone who believes and obeys what God has said, which is why his entire strategy revolves around ideas that contradict God's Word.*

Satan asked her, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1.) It almost sounds like an innocent question from a casual inquirer, but Satan knew exactly what his goal was.

Eve responded, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die'" (Gen. 3:2-3).

Eve almost had it right. Actually, God never forbade them to *touch* the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but only forbade them to eat from it.

Eve certainly did know enough of the truth to recognize the lie of Satan's response: "You surely shall not die!" (Gen. 3:4). That, of course, is a blatant contradiction of what God said, and it would be unlikely that Eve would believe it outright. So Satan then sugarcoated his lie with some truth, as he often does, making it much easier to swallow. He continued: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

Satan actually said three things that were true after he lied. We know that once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes *were* opened (see Gen. 3:7) as Satan had said. Additionally, God Himself later said that the man *had* become like God and that he *had* come to know good and evil (see Gen. 3:22). Take note: *Satan often mixes truth with error in order to deceive people.*

Notice also that Satan maligned God's character. God didn't want Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit for their own wellbeing and happiness, but Satan made it sound as if God was withholding something from them that was good. The majority of Satan's lies malign God's character, will, and motives.

Unfortunately, Earth's first couple rejected the truth to believe a lie, and they suffered the consequences. But notice all the elements of modern spiritual warfare in their story: Satan's only weapon was a lie couched in truth. The humans were faced with a choice to believe what God had said or what Satan had said. Believing the truth could have been their "shield of faith," but they never lifted it.

Jesus' Spiritual Warfare

As we read of Jesus' encounter with Satan during His wilderness temptation, we quickly see that Satan had not changed his methods over thousands of years. His avenue of attack was to discredit what God had said, as he knew that his only way of defeating his enemy was to dissuade Him from believing or obeying the truth. *God's Word is again at the center of the battle.* Satan volleyed his lies, and Jesus deflected them with truth. Jesus believed and obeyed what God had said. That is biblical spiritual warfare.

Jesus was faced with the same situation as Eve, Adam, and all the rest of us. He had to decide if He would listen to God or Satan. Jesus fought His spiritual battle with the "sword of the Spirit," the Word of God. Let's see what we can learn from spiritual warfare with Satan.

Recounting Jesus' second temptation, Matthew tells us:

Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Mark 4:5-7).

Here the central issue is again what God has said. Satan even quoted from the ninety-first Psalm, but He twisted it in an attempt to make it mean something that God did not intend.

Jesus responded by quoting a scripture that brought a balanced understanding of God's promise of protection found in Psalm 91. God will protect us, but not if we act foolishly, "putting Him to the test," as the note in the margin of my Bible indicates.

This is why it is so vital that we not wrench Bible verses out of context from the rest of the Bible. Every scripture must be balanced with what the rest of Scripture says.

Twisting Scripture is one of Satan's most common tactics in spiritual warfare, and sadly, he has been very successful using that tactic against many Christians who are caught up in the modern spiritual warfare movement. A classic example of such twisting is the use of the biblical phrase "pulling down strongholds" to support the idea of pulling down evil spirits in the atmosphere. As I pointed out earlier, that particular phrase, when read in context, has absolutely no application to the pulling down of evil spirits in the atmosphere. Yet the devil would love for us to think it does, so we can waste our time screaming at the principalities and powers in the sky.

In Matthew's account of Jesus third temptation we read,

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said

to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matt. 4:8-10).

This was a temptation for power. If Jesus had worshipped Satan, and if Satan then kept his promise to Him, Jesus would have gained the second-in-command position over the kingdom of darkness. He would have ruled over every unsaved human being and every evil spirit, having worldwide authority as only Satan had previously. We can only speculate in our nightmares what would have happened had Jesus yielded to that temptation.

Notice again that Jesus countered Satan's suggestion with the written Word of God. During each of the three temptations, Jesus overcame by saying, "It is written." We, too, must know God's Word and believe it if we want to avoid being deceived and fall into Satan's traps. That is what spiritual warfare is all about.

The Battle Ground

For the most part, the only power that Satan and his demons have is to plant thoughts in people's hearts and minds (and even that is limited by God; see 1 Cor. 10:13). With that thought in mind, consider the following sampling of scriptures:

But Peter said, "*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?*" (Acts 5:3, emphasis added).

And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him... (John 13:2, emphasis added).

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, *paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...* (1 Tim. 4:1, emphasis added).

But 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 (2 Cor. 11:3, emphasis added).

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 (1 Cor. 7:5, emphasis added).

For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that *the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain* (1 Thes. 3:5, emphasis added).

...in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4, emphasis added).

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, *who deceives the whole world*; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Rev. 12:9, emphasis added).

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies* (John 8:44, emphasis added).

These scriptures and others make it clear that the primary battleground in biblical spiritual warfare is our hearts and minds. Satan attacks with thoughts—evil suggestions, wrong ideas, false philosophies, temptations, various lies and so on. Our means of defense is knowing, believing, and acting upon God's Word.

It is vitally important that you understand that every thought you think does not necessarily originate from within yourself. Satan has many spokespersons who help him plant his thoughts in people's minds. He works to influence us through newspapers, books, television, magazines, radio, through friends and neighbors, and even through preachers. Even the apostle Peter was once unwittingly used as a spokesman for Satan, suggesting to Jesus that it was not God's will for Him to die (see Matt. 16:23).

But Satan and evil spirits also work directly on human minds, without any human intermediary, and all Christians will at times find themselves under direct assault. That is when the warfare begins.

I remember a dear Christian woman who once came to me to confess a problem. She said that whenever she prayed, she found that blasphemous thoughts and swear words would come to her mind. She was one of the sweetest, kindest, dearest, most dedicated women in my church, yet she had this problem with terrible thoughts.

I explained to her that those thoughts did not originate within her, but that she was being attacked by Satan, who was attempting to ruin her prayer life. She then told me she has stopped praying every day because she was so afraid she might think those thoughts again. Satan had succeeded.

So I told her to start praying again, and if those blasphemous thoughts came to her mind, she should counteract them with truth from God's Word. If a thought said to her, "Jesus was just a -----," she should say, "No, Jesus was and is the divine Son of God." If a thought came that was a swear word, she should replace that thought with a thought of praise for Jesus, and so on.

I also told her that by being afraid that she might think wrong thoughts, she was actually inviting them, as fear is somewhat of a reverse faith—a faith in the devil. By trying not to think about something, we have to think about it in order to try not to think about it.

For example, if I say to you, "Don't think about your right hand," you will immediately think about your right hand as you attempt to obey me. The harder you try, the worse it gets. The only way not to think about your right hand is to consciously think about something else, for example, your shoes. Once you have your mind on your shoes, you are not thinking about your hand.

I encouraged that dear woman to "fear not," just as the Bible commands us. And whenever she recognized a thought that was contrary to God's Word, she should replace it with one that agreed with God's Word.

I'm happy to report that she followed my advice, and, although attacked a few more times during her prayer times, she gained complete victory over her problem. She triumphed in biblical spiritual warfare.

It has also been interesting for me to discover, upon taking surveys in a number of churches, that her problem was very common. Usually more than half of the Christians I survey indicate that at one time or another, they have had blasphemous thoughts while praying. Satan is not so original.

“Take Care What You Listen To”

We cannot stop Satan and evil spirits from attacking our minds, but we don't have to allow *their* thoughts to become *our* thoughts. That is, we don't have to dwell upon demonic ideas and suggestions, taking possession of them. As it has been said, “You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair.”

Additionally, we should be careful not to subject our minds to ungodly influences whenever it is within our control. When we sit down in front of the television for an hour, or read the newspaper, we are putting out the welcome mat to be influenced with thoughts that may be satanic. Directly after He told the parable of the sower and the soils, Jesus warned, “Take care what you listen to” (Mark 4:24). Jesus knew the destructive effects of listening to lies, allowing Satan to plant his “seeds” in our hearts and minds. Those seeds may grow up into “thorns and thistles” which will ultimately choke the Word of God from our lives (see Mark 4:7, 18-19).

Peter on Spiritual Warfare

The apostle Peter understood true, biblical spiritual warfare. Never in his epistles did he instruct Christians to pull down principalities and powers over cities. He did, however, instruct them to resist Satan's attacks against their personal lives, and he told them exactly how they should resist:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Notice first that Peter indicated our position is one of defense, not offense. Satan is the one who is prowling around, not us. He is looking for us; we're not looking for him. Our job is not to attack but to resist.

Second, notice that Satan, like a lion, is seeking someone to *devour*. How could he possibly devour Christians? Did Peter mean that Satan could literally eat their flesh like a lion would? Obviously not. The only way Satan could devour a Christian is to deceive him into believing a lie that destroys his faith.

Third, notice Peter tells us to resist the devil through our faith. Our struggle is not a physical battle, and we can't fight Satan by swinging our fists in the air. He attacks us with lies, and we resist those lies by standing firm in our faith in God's Word. That, again, is scriptural spiritual warfare.

The Christians to whom Peter was writing were suffering some severe persecution, and thus were being tempted to renounce their faith in Christ. It is often when we are in the midst of adverse circumstances that Satan will attack with his doubts and lies. That is the time to stand firm in your faith. That is the “evil day” of which Paul wrote when you need to “put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to *stand firm* against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:11, emphasis added).

James on Spiritual Warfare

The apostle James also mentioned something about spiritual warfare in his epistle. Did he tell the Christians that their prayers could determine the outcome of angelic battles? No. Did he tell them to pull down the spirits of lust, apathy, and drunkenness over their cities? No. Did he tell them to study the history of their cities so they could determine which kind of evil spirits have been there since the beginning? No.

James believed in scriptural, spiritual warfare, and so he wrote:

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7, emphasis added).

Once again, notice that the Christian's posture is one of defense—we are to resist, not attack. When we do, James promises us that Satan will flee. He has no reason to stick around a Christian who will not be persuaded to believe his lies, follow his suggestions, or yield to his temptations.

Notice also that James first instructed us to submit to God. We submit to God by submitting to His Word. Our resistance against Satan is predicated upon our submission to God's Word.

John on Spiritual Warfare

The apostle John also wrote about spiritual warfare in his first epistle. Did he tell us to go up to the high places in order to tear down the devil's strongholds? No. Did he tell us how to cast the demon of anger out of Christians who sometimes get angry? No.

Rather, John, like Peter and James, only believed in biblical, spiritual warfare, and so his instructions are the same:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6).

Notice that John's entire discussion in these verses revolves around Satan's lies and God's truth. We are to test the spirits to see if they are from God, and the test is based on truth. Evil spirits will not admit that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. They are liars.

John also told us that we have overcome evil spirits. That is, as citizens of the kingdom of light, we are not under their dominion any longer. The greater one, Jesus, lives in us. People who have Christ living in them should not be afraid of demons.

John also said that the world listens to the evil spirits, which indicates that those evil spirits must be speaking. We know that they are not speaking audibly, but are planting lies in people's minds.

As followers of Christ, we should not be listening to the lies of evil spirits, and John states that those who know God are listening to us, because we have the truth; we have God's Word.

Again, notice that Satan's strategy is to persuade people to believe his lies. Satan cannot defeat us if we know and believe the truth. That is what scriptural, spiritual warfare is all about.

Faith is the Key

Knowing God's Word is not enough to win in spiritual battle. The key is *truly believing* what God has said. This is true in resisting the devil and in casting out of demons. For example, consider again an example we have examined previously, when Jesus gave His twelve disciples "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out" (Matt. 10:1). We find them, seven chapters later, unable to cast a demon out of an epileptic boy.⁸ When Jesus learned of their failure, He lamented:

"O *unbelieving* and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matt. 17:17, emphasis added).

It was their unbelief that Jesus bemoaned. Moreover, when His disciples later questioned Him as to why they were unable to cast the demon out, Jesus responded, "Because of the littleness of your faith" (Matt. 17:20). Thus we see that their authority to cast out demons did not work apart from their faith.

Our success in casting out demons and resisting the devil is dependent on our faith in God's Word. If we truly do believe what God has said, then we will talk like it and act like it. Dogs chase people who run from them, and it is the same with the devil. If you run, the devil will chase you. If you'll stand firm in your faith, however, the devil will flee from you (see Jas. 4:7).

No doubt the apostles' lack of faith would have been very evident to any observer, as they tried, but failed, to deliver that boy from a demon. If that demon put on the same show for the disciples as it performed in front of Jesus, throwing the boy into a "violent convulsion" (Luke 9:42) and causing him to foam at the mouth (see Mark 9:20), it is possible that the disciples' faith turned to fear. They were perhaps paralyzed by what they witnessed.

One who has faith, however, is not moved by what he sees, but rather, is moved only by what God has said. "We walk by faith, *not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7, emphasis added). God cannot lie (see Tit. 1:2), and so even if our circumstances seemingly contradict what God has said, we should remain steadfast in faith.

Notice that Jesus delivered the boy in just a few seconds. He did it by faith. He did not waste His time conducting a "deliverance session." Those who have faith in their God-given authority don't need to spend hours casting out a demon.

Moreover, there is no record that Jesus screamed at the demon. Those who have faith don't need to scream. Neither did Jesus repeatedly command the demon to come out. One command was sufficient. A second command would have been an admission of doubt.

In Summary

The disciple-making minister teaches, by his example and with his words, biblical spiritual warfare, so that his disciples are able to stand firm against Satan's schemes and walk in obedience to Christ's commands. He does not lead his disciples to follow the current "winds of doctrine" that promote unbiblical methods of spiritual warfare, knowing that those who practice such methods are wrongly focused and are actually deceived by Satan, the very one they are victoriously claiming to engage.

⁸ We should be very cautious in assuming that all epilepsy is caused by an indwelling evil spirit.