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Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare

By David Servant

EIGHT

Scriptural Spiritual Warfare

I had just delivered a sermon on how to resist the devil by faith in God's Word. Innocently, being a guest speaker, I had mentioned a popular teaching that many Christians had embraced concerning the demonic nature of owls and frogs. During that particular time in the late seventies, personal deliverance from demons was a very hot topic, and there was much extreme teaching. Amazingly, it was thought by many that you could open your home to an invasion of demons if you had any pictures of owls or frogs hanging on the walls!

The whole teaching was built upon a few verses in the Old Testament about owls being unclean animals and one verse in Revelation that describes some demons that resembled frogs. Still, many Christians in my audience that day were stunned when I told them I had several pictures of owls hanging in my house, and even possessed a ceramic frog, but I was not afraid of any demons gaining entrance to my home. I explained to them that *God* is the one who created owls and frogs, and that there was nothing in the Bible that even intimated that we could open our homes to demons if we had a ceramic frog by our fireplace. I told them that any Christian who was afraid of pictures of owls was a Christian who did not believe God's promise that "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

As soon as my sermon was finished and the pastor dismissed the people, a woman in the congregation hurried to the front of the church and cornered me. "I heard your comments about owls and frogs," she said, "but you are entirely wrong. Let me tell you what happened to us!" (I immediately recognized that I was dealing with a person whose theology was built upon her experiences, rather than the Bible.)

She told me her story: "Several months ago, my husband and I began to notice some very strange things were happening in our home. In the middle of the night, we would hear noises." (I thought to myself, *So what? Anyone who listens for noises in the night will hear them.*) She continued: "Sometimes, when I would be taking a shower, the temperature of the water would suddenly change!" (*That happens every time I'm taking a shower and someone flushes a toilet or turns the water on somewhere else in the house.*) "Sometimes, when I would open the refrigerator door, things inside would just fall out onto the floor for no reason." (*That happens all the time when my kids don't put things back properly into the refrigerator.*)

I was waiting for her to tell me that sometimes, when she washed her husband's socks in the washing machine, some of his socks mysteriously disappeared! (She didn't.)

“So we called pastor so-and-so, whom God really uses in the area of deliverance, and he came over to investigate. He walked through our house anointing everything with oil and casting out Satan while looking for avenues which may have provided entrance for demonic activity in our home.”

She then told me that when pastor so-and-so came to her son’s room, he sensed an evil presence there, and, upon opening the toy box, discovered the reason for all their troubles. There it was—gasp!—Kermit the frog! That stuffed toy had opened the door for demons to invade their home!

Ashes to Ashes...

But that is not the end of the story. They took poor Kermit out to their back yard to burn him. “It was bizarre,” she said, “It was next to impossible to get that thing to burn.” (Again I thought to myself, *All stuffed toys are made of inflammable material for safety reasons.*) “And when it did finally burn, it gave off this really strange odor!” (I was not surprised to learn that inflammable materials emit strange odors when burned!) And ever since the burning of Kermit, things had dramatically improved in their home.

When her story was over, I felt sorry for Kermit, but I felt even sorrier for her. As long as our Christian life is based upon experiences rather than on what God says, we are wide open for deception. I wondered how long it would be before she and her husband would have another imaginary battle with demons.

That woman is a representative of so many Christians who are more conscious of the devil and demons than of God. Some are always involved in a great battle with the devil, and they start each day, not in prayer and Bible study, but in binding demons in their bedrooms. Some of them hide in their homes on Halloween night, fearfully praying that God will protect them from all the wicked spirits that are out that evening. Some of them are afraid of being cursed through the prayers of Christians who dislike them. Some of them are joining other militant Christians on the tops of tall buildings in order to shout at the principalities and powers and pull down the “strong man” over their town. All of them are missing out on the blessing of knowing what the Bible really says about spiritual warfare. And whether they realize it or not, all of them are losing the very battle that they are trying to win, because they believe something other than what God has said. Satan has deceived them.

First and Foremost...

The first thing we should 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 should 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 a guaranteed 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 Bible I use, Satan appears on page 2 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 that “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 concerning what God has said. Her response would reveal to him whether he had a chance at deceiving her into being disobedient. *Satan has no avenue to defeat 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 forbid them to *touch* the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but only forbid eating from it. Perhaps her husband, who may have passed God’s original command on to her, thought it might insure her obedience if he added the part about touching the tree. If that is true, in doing so, Adam became the first of God’s many spokespersons who add their own embellishments to His commandments.

Eve, however, knew 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 buy it outright. So Satan then sugarcoated his lie with some truth, making it much easier to swallow, as he often does. 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 made three truthful statements directly after his lie. Once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes *were* opened (see Gen. 3:7). 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 well being and happiness, but Satan made it sound as if God was withholding something from them that was wonderful. 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.

Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, and the serpent was cursed to crawl on his belly and eat dust all the days of his life. We, of course, know that every snake today crawls on its belly, but is it possible that Satan must also? It is obvious that God’s curse addressed to the serpent has more application than just to snakes (see Gen. 3:15). Perhaps we should envision Satan not as a powerful angelic figure standing proudly in the heavenly places, but as a groveling snake-like creature who squirms along with his face in the dirt.

Spiritual Warfare and the Second Adam

As we read the account 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 volleys a lie, and Jesus deflects it with truth. That is biblical spiritual warfare.

Jesus had been baptized by John a few weeks earlier, and God had spoken audibly at that event, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Not surprisingly then, Satan's first attack against Jesus involved what God had just declared about Him. Satan said to Jesus, "*If You are the Son of God*, command that these stones become bread" (Matt. 4:3, emphasis added).

Was Satan doubtful that Jesus was God's Son, thus desiring some convincing proof, or was he attempting to cause Jesus to doubt who He was? I'm not sure. I suspect, however, that the second scenario is a better possibility. It is difficult for me to believe that Satan wasn't already convinced that Jesus was the Son of God in light of the events that surrounded His birth.

Additionally, although there is much mystery concerning Christ's incarnation, we know that Jesus was not born with a fully-developed adult mind, and thus it was at some point in his childhood when He actually knew and could say He was God's Son. God the Father revealed it to Him, and so it was something He could have chosen to believe or not believe. This was just as true concerning what He heard spoken from heaven at His baptism. Therefore, perhaps the devil was attempting to cause Jesus to doubt who God said He was.

Regardless of whether this particular interpretation is true, that does not discount the fact that Satan will attempt to cause us to doubt what God has said about us. For example, we are told in the Bible that we are sons of God through faith in Christ (see Gal. 3:26). Satan would prefer that we not believe that, because whether we do or not makes a big difference in how we will live our daily lives. The devil will, therefore, lie to us in that regard.

Another (and no doubt more traditional) interpretation of Jesus' first temptation is that Satan, capitalizing on Jesus' hunger, was tempting Him simply to disobey God's decree in Deuteronomy 8:3 that man shall not live on bread alone. In other words, if Satan had said, "Command these stones to become bread *and potatoes*," then it would not have been a sin for Jesus to do so.

This interpretation, rather than the first one I mentioned, is supported by the fact that Jesus did not respond to Satan by saying, "Oh yes, I am the Son of God! God said I was!" Rather, His response seems to indicate that He was tempted to disobey God's decree concerning living by bread alone rather than tempted to doubt that He was the Son of God.

I'm sure there is much more to Jesus' first temptation than any of us realize, and I would love to dig deeper in our investigation to bring out every possible point of consideration. It would, however, serve no good purpose as far as our subject is concerned and so I will conclude and proceed to the second temptation. It is important, however, that we understand that 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.

The 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 again the central issue is what God has said. This time, Satan even quoted from the ninety-first Psalm, but He twisted it in an attempt to make it mean something that God never intended.

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 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 discussed in an earlier chapter, 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.

Christ’s second temptation also began with Satan saying, “If you are the Son of God.” There is again the possibility that Satan was attempting to cause Jesus to doubt who He was.

A more traditional interpretation of this second incident is that it was a temptation for Jesus to gain people’s attention by using His power for something other than truly beneficial miracles, such as physical healing or raising someone from the dead, and so on.

The main point is that Jesus overcame Satan’s temptation by knowing and acting upon God’s Word. Hopefully, all of us, if faced with a similar temptation, would know enough of God’s Word to recognize when Satan is twisting it.

The Third Temptation

The third temptation is perhaps the easiest to understand. Matthew writes:

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 end of the bargain, 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 influence 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.

Satan's Strategy

Some Christians have the idea the devil and demons have the power to stop their cars from running, to send rain on their picnics, and to change the temperature of the water when they are taking a shower. But, 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).

The Battle Ground

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 wreck 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).

A Personal Example

One particular example of spiritual warfare in my own life is so personal I hesitate to share it, but I will because I think it will help some of my readers.

Some years ago, while I was engaged in conversation with a friend, I suddenly found myself thinking about kissing that person on the lips! Most alarming was the fact that the person I was speaking with was of the same sex! I was immediately repulsed, and I'm sure that my alarm was evident to my friend, although he didn't question me about it.

Then the thought came to me: *Face it, David, you are a homosexual*. I didn't know quite as much spiritually as I know now, but praise God I was able to recognize that thought as being from the devil.

Over the next few days, several more times, while I was engaged in conversation with male friends and acquaintances, I had those same perverted and troubling thoughts. Looking back, I think my great concern over it added to the problem, as I tried so hard not to think those thoughts again.

Eventually I realized what was happening, and the next time those thoughts came, I said in my mind, *No devil, I'm not a homosexual, I'm a normal human male who is also a child of God*. Then I would immediately replace that alarming, perverted thought with the thought of kissing my wife. I quickly got victory!

I have since wondered if that is how some men actually do become homosexuals. I do not believe they are born that way, but that at some point they begin to *believe* that they are different from other men. *Perhaps* because of ill feelings toward his mother, a young man finds himself, quite innocently, more attracted to males, and Satan capitalizes on those feelings and slowly convinces him he is a homosexual. *Perhaps* because a man never felt accepted by his father, he innocently seeks for acceptance from other males, and Satan uses those feelings to feed him lies about his sexual identity. *Perhaps* because a man is slightly effeminate (some men seem less "manly" by our cultural standards), he begins to believe a lie that Satan is feeding him.

I'm not saying that these are the reasons all homosexuals are like they are, I'm only suggesting a few possibilities, knowing something about how Satan operates. I'm sure there are plenty of men who are homosexuals simply because they are in complete rebellion against God, and their sexual lives are just one of numerous indications of their depravity.

The hope for any homosexual is, of course, believing in Jesus and becoming one of His followers. Then he will be transformed and gain total victory as his mind is renewed upon God's Word (Rom 12:2).

The Importance of Knowing God's Word

The first step in preparing to win in our struggle against Satan and evil spirits is to know what God has said. If we don't know what God has said, we won't recognize Satan's lies. If we don't know what God has said, we won't be able to believe what He has said or do what He said.

The only way to get to know what God has said is to expend some effort. The more time you can spend reading and meditating upon the Bible, the better. You should attend a church regularly where a pastor who has a calling and an anointing to teach faithfully teaches God's Word. Just because a church is "evangelical" doesn't necessarily mean anything. The question is, how often does the pastor read or quote from Scripture in his sermons? Does he preach on a *variety* of biblical themes? Does he preach only from Old Testament stories? Does he preach only from the Gospels? Does he teach any other times besides Sunday mornings? A good pastor places a high priority on the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, because he knows God's Word is what equips, strengthens, and nourishes his people. Once you know what God has said and believe it, you are ready for battle.

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 be careful about having ceramic frogs by our fireplaces, lest we open our homes to an invasion of demons? No. 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.

Paul on Spiritual Warfare

Paul, the apostle, also wrote about spiritual warfare. His most significant passage on the subject is found in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, and, since we have already examined it in detail in an earlier chapter, I won't exhaust you in this one.

This is Paul's famous passage about putting on the armor of God, a beautiful metaphor which describes how we can be protected from Satan's onslaughts by knowing and believing God's Word:

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, *that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil*. 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. 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. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with *truth*, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of *the gospel* of peace; 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. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is *the word of God* (Eph. 6:10-17, emphasis added)

Paul enumerates four categories of evil spirits, but categorizing them is obviously not his primary focus, nor should it be ours. Notice also that he makes no mention of demons of lust, demons of apathy, and so on, or even the prince of Rome.

Once again we see that our position is defensive; three times we are told to *stand firm*.

This is not a physical battle fought with physical weapons. Our armor is not built out of metal but out of truth. Notice Paul's use of the words *truth*, *gospel*, *faith*, and *word of God*.

Since we protect ourselves with truth, the flaming missiles which evil spirits are firing at us can only be lies. With the shield of faith we can extinguish every single one.

Jesus on Spiritual Warfare

Finally we come to what Jesus taught about spiritual warfare.

First of all, He demonstrated what biblical spiritual warfare is all about when he encountered Satan in His wilderness temptation, an incident we have already considered earlier in this chapter. Jesus' warfare with the devil revolved around what God had said. Satan's attack came through suggestions, doubts, and temptations. Jesus overcame him in every instance by knowing, quoting, and obeying God's Word.

In the parable of the sower and the soils, Jesus revealed to us that it is Satan who steals the Word of God when it is sown into certain people's hearts. Of course, the only way Satan could steal God's Word once it is sown in someone's heart is by persuading that person to believe one of his lies.

Jesus also revealed to us that Satan is a liar by nature and even called him "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Likewise, He told His disciples to be careful what they listened to (see Mark 4:24), and promised them that if they would abide in His word, they would know the truth, and the truth would make them free (John 8:31-32).

Jesus proclaimed, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness" (John 8:12). Light is symbolic for truth, darkness for deception. It is only as we follow Jesus, knowing and acting on what He has said, that we escape from the darkness of Satan's deception. That is biblical, spiritual warfare.

Finally, on the cross Jesus rendered Satan powerless in regard to spiritual death, and now anyone on Earth can potentially escape from Satan's grasp. Each person, however, must know and believe the gospel if he is to escape, which makes the very act of salvation an act of spiritual warfare. Every time someone hears the gospel there is a spiritual struggle, and every time someone believes the gospel, a spiritual victory is won.

To maintain that victory, the Christian must continue to believe the truth, even when Satan and his minions attack with their “flaming missiles” (Eph. 6:16).

Satan is Persistent

As long as Satan and his evil spirits are around, we will have to struggle against them. And just because we have won a victory today is no guarantee that Satan will not be back to try again tomorrow. Jesus informed us of the devil’s persistence:

“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation” (Matt. 12:43-45).

This evil spirit who was cast out eventually came back, and unfortunately, he discovered his former “house” was “unoccupied, swept, and put in order.” In order to keep the demon out, the man needed to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and filled with God’s Word so he could stand firm in faith against the evil spirit.

We would do a person a disservice if we cast a demon out of him and then did not lead him to Christ and teach him how to resist the devil by faith in God’s Word. Once he is born again, his body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, and once he knows what God has said, he is equipped for spiritual battle. By the same token, every Christian needs to be prepared for a demonic attack, so he can resist “in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13).

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.¹ 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 upon 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’ll run, the devil will chase you. If you’ll stand firm in your faith, 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

¹ We should be very cautious in assuming that all epilepsy is caused by an indwelling evil spirit.

show for the disciples as he 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.

Who You Believe—the Secret of Spiritual Success

The battleground of our spiritual battle is not in the heavenly places, but in our own minds. Either we are thinking about and believing Satan’s thoughts, or thinking about and believing what God has said. Our thoughts about ourselves, about others, about God, about our circumstances, and so on, are divine or demonic. Our faith is ultimately either in what God has said, or what Satan has said.

Jesus exhorted us, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). That is not only the secret to successful prayer, but the secret for successful spiritual warfare. Believe what God says. If you do, Satan and his evil spirits will have no chance of overcoming you.

Epilogue

I’m overjoyed that God is in control, and that the outcome of some supposed cosmic battle between God and Satan doesn’t depend upon us.

I’m glad that God is all-powerful and all-wise, and that His eternal plan is perfect.

I’m thrilled to know that Satan doesn’t have any authority that is beyond God’s authority, and that God is truly sovereign, the “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matt. 11:25).

I’m happy that demons can’t possess us when we sin, and that we can overcome the devil simply by trusting and obeying God.

I’m thankful that we don’t need to fast to gain victory over Satan, or fear that we are destined to suffer because of some supposed curse placed upon our great-grandparents.

And I’m elated that by knowing the truth, we have been set free from having to believe *any* of Satan’s many lies (John 8:32).

Whether you have realized it or not, while you were reading this book you were involved in spiritual warfare. Just as the devil said to Eve, “Has God said....?”, no doubt Satan placed doubt-filled questions in your mind as you read. The fact that you’ve made it this far, however, is a good indication that you are a sure winner in your spiritual battle. You believe the truth, and Satan has no avenue to overcome you. Congratulations! Keep your armor on, and rejoice that someday soon our struggle will be over forever!

Then comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, *when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power*. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:24-25, emphasis added).

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and
brimstone...and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev.
20:10).