

# UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- Bill Patton -

## I. Introduction: James 4:1, 4, 7-10

### A. The Spiritual Warfare “Scene” the last Decade

Novels emphasize demonic activity.

Spiritual Warfare equated with Warfare Prayer, Worship Warfare, Strategic Level Warfare, and Spiritual Mapping.

This view is too man-centered and too narrow.

### B. James Understood Spiritual War is on 3 Fronts:

- ◆ The battle against our sinful DESIRES
- ◆ The battle against our love of the WORLD
- ◆ The battle against our enemy, the DEVIL

In Doing Spiritual Warfare contemporary Christians tend to be:

- ◆ Ignorant of indwelling sin
- ◆ Careless of the world’s influence
- ◆ Engaged in unbiblical methods of fighting the devil

### C. Remedy: Do Spiritual Warfare in the Classic Mode

The Puritans had it right.

*“Puritan pastoral theologians...wrote frequently and with great depth on spiritual warfare. As they wrote about Scripture, the devil, and human nature, they were alert to the evil and deceptive strategies of Satan. At the same time they made heart-searching analysis of the human condition.” Dave Powlison<sup>1</sup>*

Thomas Brooks’ Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices  
Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress and Holy War  
William Gurnall’s The Christian in Complete Armor

## II. Contemporary Approaches take “Casting-out” to Extremes.

- A. We discovered we could still cast out demons!  
But casting-out devils is not a panacea.
- B. Legitimate *ekballistic* model of helping demonized individuals.  
Falsely applied to every imaginable situation!  
*Ek* = Out  
*Ballistic* = Throw
- C. Range of theories and methodologies emerged.
  1. Binding the Strong Man – Poor exegesis of Mt. 12:29  
Jesus binds the Strong Man...
  2. Binding and Loosing – Poor understanding of Mt. 18:18
  3. Rebuking Territorial Spirits (Daniel 10:13)
  4. Curses – Galatians 3:13 (Curse of the Law)

Ekbballistic method became all-encompassing

## III. Contemporary Approaches Neglect the Doctrine of Sin.

- A. *"Since many evangelicals no longer view the world around them as Protestants historically have--through the doctrines of creation, the Fall, and redemption--there is no doctrine of original sin left from which to form the category necessary for making sense of evil and suffering. Consequently, we shift to a metaphysical war between the good God and His angels and the bad god and his demons. The problem is no longer viewed as being the inherent sinfulness residing in the shadowy darkness of my own human heart and the resulting rebellion against God and his Word. Instead the problem is outside of me--conspiracies, secular humanists, demons."* Kim Riddlebarger<sup>2</sup>

When we learn doctrine of remaining sin, the nature of the battle changes – and the battlefield shifts from the metaphysical realm to my heart.

*"Sin can do without the Devil what the Devil cannot do without sin."*  
Ralph Venning<sup>3</sup>

- B. Indwelling sin is ever active.
  - ◆ It seizes every opportunity. (Rom. 7:8, 11)
  - ◆ It produces every kind of covetous desire. (Rom. 7:8)
  - ◆ It constantly deceives us. (Rom 7:11)
  - ◆ It is living in us. (Rom. 7:17)

- ◆ It is at work in all our faculties. (Rom.7:23)
- ◆ It is hostile to God. (Rom 8:7)
- ◆ It wages war within. (Rom. 7:23)

*"He who dies fighting in this warfare assuredly dies a conqueror."*  
John Owen<sup>4</sup>

*"The believer must daily exercise himself in this spiritual warfare so he may succeed."* Sinclair Ferguson<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. Contemporary Approaches Forget God's Sovereignty.

- A. *"Generally, strategic level spirits... 'dominate' an area, or 'control' a town... these terms share the concept of custodianship or sovereignty."* Lowe<sup>6</sup>
- B. *"God's sovereign authority over Satan could not be emphasized more strongly. Satan... is only the false god of this world. He plays out his malice on the stage of the earth, but his works on the earth will be destroyed. He exists at God's forbearance, to fulfil God's purposes. In the occult worldview, the demons have independent existence. But right from the start, the biblical worldview shows that evil spirits are radically subordinate to the Almighty who alone is God."* Powlison<sup>7</sup>
- C. *"Evil-spirit beings exist within the sovereignty of God's purposes to redeem and judge responsible human beings."* Powlison<sup>8</sup>
- D. *"[Without this understanding,] spiritual warfare becomes skewed. The demons become increasingly autonomous; sin becomes demonized; the world gains the look and feel of superstition rather than biblical wisdom... In this demon filled world, human vigilance must strike the deciding blow in battle... The Bible gives an opposite, theocentric explanation. There, the love of God... strikes the deciding blow in the battle. We take refuge in our shepherd's care, learning vigilance, putting on his armor, and strengthen our arms with the strength of his might."* Powlison<sup>9</sup>

#### V. Contemporary Approaches Misunderstand "Victory".

- A. Our battle is a moral battle, hence our victories are moral victories.

*"Notice [in the Genesis account] the nature of our warfare. Satan is malicious, a liar, and a murderer. He himself is morally evil and is judged as such. He tempts, deceives, and seeks to rule Adam and Eve, conforming them to evil. The core issue [in our spiritual*

*warfare]...is a moral issue. Who will rule our hearts? Whose voice will we listen to? Who will we believe? Trust for blessings? Obey?"...Will we prove obedient creatures or disobedient, good or evil?" Powlison<sup>10</sup>*

- B. *"Our battle is not primarily against the evil situations that occur or 'situational evil.'"*<sup>11</sup>

We seek to relieve situational evil by every means.

- ◆ We pray and fast and use doctors for healing.
- ◆ We pray that evil people or nations would repent.
- ◆ We pray and work for evil institutions to turn.

But the battle is not primarily about making the evil "go away".

Ephesians 6: The Armor is not designed to get rid of the evil day. It is rather to help us stand in the evil day.

*"Though Satan has been decisively defeated, he is engaged in a desperate counterattack against the Church. Our role is to hold our ground in the strength provided by the traditional spiritual disciplines. We conquer Satan not by overwhelming all opposition to the gospel [through strategic level spiritual warfare] but by remaining firm in the face of opposition."* Lowe<sup>12</sup>

Spiritual Victory = Defeating our Moral Evil with Spirit's Power.

## VI. How do we do spiritual warfare in the classic mode?

- A. We Fight Indwelling Sin.

1. Mortify

Resist Devil, Love Not World, KILL Sin

We are commanded to "kill" or "put to death" or "mortify" the remainders of sin as long we are in the body.

*"Rise mightily against the first actings of thy distemper, its first conceptions, suffer it not to get the least ground...As sin gets ground in the affections to delight in, it gets ground also upon the understanding to slight it...If it have allowance for one step, it will take another. Dost thou find thy corruption to begin to entangle thy thoughts? Rise up with all thy strength against it, with no less indignation than if it had fully accomplished what it aims at."* John Owen<sup>13</sup>

*"The believer...must constantly battle against sin. He must learn its strategy in relation to his own life -- its ways, wiles, methods, advantages and occasions of success and must daily exercise himself in this spiritual warfare so he may succeed."*  
Sinclair Ferguson<sup>14</sup>

- ◆ Reflect on your sin -- discover your "predominate lusts".
- ◆ Review sin patterns with your pastor. What does he discern?

## 2. Watch

*"Do you find it [sin] dwelling in you, always present with you, exciting itself, or putting forth its poison with facility and easiness at all times in all your duties, when you would do good? What humiliation, what self-abasement, what intensesness in prayer, what diligence, **what watchfulness**, doth this call for at your hands!"* John Owen<sup>15</sup>

## B. We Fight the Influence of the World in our Lives.

1. Love not the world or things of the world (1Jn 2:15)  
World and its desires pass away (I Jn 2:17)
2. Friendship with world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4)
3. Spirit of Antichrist is in the world (1Jn 4 :3)  
A greater one is in you (1 Jn 4:3,4)

## C. We Fight the Devil.

Resist – How do we resist???? Binding? Casting out?

- ◆ James: Draw near to God with faith and humility
- ◆ Peter: Self Control, Alertness, Faith that stands
- ◆ Paul: Put on the Armor

We put on the **belt of truth** as we seek to understand and sincerely apply Scripture and sound doctrine. We gird ourselves with the truth and stake everything upon it.

We put on the **breastplate of righteousness** by receiving afresh the free gift of God's righteousness and by shunning all sin. This will protect our hearts from guilt and condemnation.

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We put on **the shoes of the gospel** as we are mindful of our desperate need for the cross. We remind ourselves of the gospel daily.

We take up the **shield of faith** when we trust God, who has ordained every trial. We take up the shield of faith when we believe his promises.

We put on **the helmet** of salvation when we remember the absolute certainty of our ultimate deliverance.

We take up **the sword of the Spirit** when we fill our hearts with the Word of God through reading, study, instruction, meditation, and memorization.

**Prayer** is not a separate weapon, but rather something which pervades the use of all the armor. We are to “pray continually” (1 Thes. 5:17), especially in the day of evil.

*“Central to our warfare strategy are diligent labor, patient endurance, and above all, **persistent prayer**.”* Lowe<sup>16</sup>

## VII. Conclusion:

**The classic mode of doing spiritual warfare is the way for Christians and the Church to WIN.**

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> David Powlison, Power Encounters, p. 35

<sup>2</sup> Kim Riddlebarger contributor, Michael Horton, Power Religion, p.278

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Venning, The Sinfulness of Sin, p. 186

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, The Works of John Owen Volume VI, p.175

<sup>5</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, John Owen on the Christian Life

<sup>6</sup> Chuck Lowe, Territorial Spirits and World Evangelization, p. 20

<sup>7</sup> David Powlison, *ibid.* p. 53

<sup>8</sup> David Powlison, *ibid.* p. 58

<sup>9</sup> David Powlison, *ibid.* p. 59

<sup>10</sup> David Powlison, *ibid.* p. 53

<sup>11</sup> David Powlison's term: The evil that happens to us. Evil situations that occur.

<sup>12</sup> Lowe, *ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>13</sup> John Owen, *ibid.*, p.62

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> John Owen, *ibid.*, p.169

<sup>16</sup> Lowe, *ibid.*, p. 135