



# Spiritual Warfare

## Part 1: An Introduction

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Due to the fact that I often get asked questions about different topics related to spiritual warfare, this is a series I have been wanting to write for a long time. I have wanted to put something down in writing on this topic since I finished preaching through the book of Ephesians with its culminating passage on the armor of God almost 8 years ago! Long overdue.

Though I have come dangerously close to actually starting this series on a number of occasions, I always managed to avoid it, choosing instead some more pressing topic or series of articles that needed to be written. Now the time has come to dive head first into a series of articles on spiritual warfare that I pray will be used by God to equip, encourage, and edify His church.

### **A Hot Topic**

I think it would be safe to say that there are few topics in Christianity that are as clouded by misunderstanding, false assumptions, bad information, unbiblical practices, and mystical, superstitious, beliefs as the subject of spiritual warfare. Consequently, the subject is capable of creating some pretty passionate and oftentimes heated responses from people who feel invested in certain practices, techniques, or authors.

While preaching through Ephesians 6, I took four weeks in the middle of the chapter to present what the Bible says concerning spiritual warfare from other passages of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> During one message titled, “Wrong Warfare,” I quoted from a popular author, Neil T. Anderson as an illustration of a *wrong* approach to a couple aspects of spiritual warfare. After the sermon, a lady visiting our church went up to another lady who was

<sup>1</sup> Much of that material will be presented here in written form in coming articles in this series.

a member and said with all seriousness, “You need to get out of this church! This man is a heretic! He is teaching heresy!” This visitor was heavily invested in the writings and teachings of Neil T. Anderson and my critique of some of his teachings made me a “heretic” in her book. Needless to say, this can be a very controversial and heated subject in some circles.

Spiritual warfare is also a very popular topic. Just a quick search on Amazon.com for “*Spiritual Warfare*” yielded over 2,700 products. If you think that is a lot to digest, don’t even bother googling the words and trying to sort through all that the internet has to offer.<sup>2</sup>

Where can a person who is hungry to learn about the spiritual conflict in which we are involved turn to find answers? Searching for books on the subject is likely to lead you into a swamp of very confusing waters. You are just as likely to pick up the unbiblical teachings of Neil T. Anderson<sup>3</sup> as you are to purchase something much more biblical by Charles Spurgeon.<sup>4</sup> You will find a dozen different approaches to spiritual warfare from hundreds of different authors.

There seems to be an ever present hunger for teaching on this subject. Christians, young and old, new and mature, want to know about angels and demons and the spiritual struggle that exists in the heavens described in Scripture. That ever-present hunger is met by a never-ending stream of books and teachings which promise deliverance from demons, victory over sin, and sure triumph in our spiritual battle.

<sup>2</sup> Google results for “*Spiritual Warfare*” yielded 6,310,000 results.

<sup>3</sup> *Winning Spiritual Warfare* by Neil T. Anderson came in at number 9 in an Amazon.com search.

<sup>4</sup> I highly recommend *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer’s Life*, a collection of sermons by Charles H. Spurgeon on the subject. This book came in at number 12 on Amazon.com’s list.

As I will seek to show in the articles to come, much of what is taught in Christian circles concerning spiritual warfare is not found in Scripture at all. Much of it is pagan, superstitious nonsense. Much of it is patently unbiblical techniques which are founded upon Scriptures taken from their contexts and twisted. Some of it is pure tradition - things we have been taught or heard preached - which have never been tested by Scripture.

Error is rampant in this realm and I don't think it is by accident. I believe the enemy of our souls would love to get us off track, trip us up, or distract us with methodologies that are unprofitable and unproductive. If Satan can mislead a Christian concerning true biblical spiritual warfare, he can neutralize that Christian's effectiveness, and in effect, keep him out of the battle entirely.

If there is any subject where Satan has a vested interest in confusing, misleading, and deceiving people, it is this one. If there is any area where discernment and clear biblical thinking is needed, it is here, in the realm of teaching on spiritual warfare.

The approach that people take toward this subject runs the gamut from denial to delusional, apathy to zeal and everything in between. Some people deny that Satan exists, others see a demon behind every bush and under every stone. Some folks don't give a passing thought to Satan, his activity, or his ploys. Others are so preoccupied with the demonic that they hardly have time for anything other than battling demons, binding Satan and renouncing curses. While some don't give any thought to the activity of the unseen world, others are so consumed with it that they live in constant threat, fear, or even terror of their unseen enemy. The perspectives one can be exposed to in the realm of spiritual warfare practices range from the orthodox to the absurd.

There is all sorts of nonsense being taught across the Christian landscape, most of which has no basis in Scripture and has more in common with pagan mysticism than anything biblical or Christian.

So if you happen to be asking, "So why start a series like this?" you have the answer. I believe that the Bible describes what true spiritual warfare is and I do not believe that by and large most Christians have a full and functioning understanding of what it looks like or how it is waged. My hope and prayer is that the time and energy that is invested in this series by me in writing and by you in reading may be used by God to call us to Scripture as

the guide for waging an effective spiritual battle. We must go to the Bible and ask, "What am I told to do in order to be a soldier in this spiritual battle?" When we ask that question and then allow the Bible to speak for itself, we avoid the pagan mysticism, the faithless superstition, the terrifying preoccupation with the demonic and the unbiblical practices that have somehow wed themselves to the church.

I believe that this series of articles will stretch some thinking, challenge some traditions, and for some of us, plow all new ground as we seek to build a theology of spiritual warfare on the Bible. We will see that tradition, superstition, mysticism, our own thinking, or worse yet, the testimony of demons themselves, prove to be very poor foundations for our theology.

### **A Personal Journey**

As with the subject of *Hearing the Voice of God*,<sup>5</sup> spiritual warfare is one that I have spent a lot of time wrestling through. I have undergone a reformation of sorts in which I had to jettison much of what I was taught and had absorbed as a new believer.

As I launch this series on spiritual warfare it is appropriate that I share a little bit of personal testimony in order that you might know a little of my own journey with these issues. Personal testimonies are, well, just that - personal. They are not objective. They are nothing more than anecdotal. We don't build our theology on personal testimonies, whether ours or someone else's. We need to build our understanding of spiritual warfare on the Bible and the Bible **alone**. My own story helps to illustrate the need for that.

When I got saved, I knew nothing about the Bible - nothing. I had memorized some passages of Scripture, but my knowledge of the background and teaching of Bible books was negligible. Though I attended church somewhat regularly before going off to Bible College, I still was not well taught or disciplined.

At Bible College I was exposed to a host of teachings and practices. It was not what I was taught in the classroom which shaped my theology of spiritual warfare, but what I picked up in my conversations and time with other students. The student body consisted of kids from all kinds of backgrounds. Some were very charismatic

<sup>5</sup> See the series of articles by the same title archived on our website at [www.kootenaichurch.org](http://www.kootenaichurch.org)

and had been exposed to all kinds of “power encounters” and “exorcisms.”

With or without the approval of staff and teachers, certain books and tapes made the rounds through the student body as teachable, zealous, and ambitious young adults gobbled up nearly everything that had a Christian flavor to it without stopping to examine it against Scripture. We had zeal in abundance, passion in excess, but discernment in very small measure.

I was exposed to such practices as praying a hedge of thorns, naming demons, renouncing past generational curses, binding Satan and rebuking Satan. There were even some people who promoted exorcisms as a legitimate means of warfare against Satan and his hosts. For the first time in my Christian life I met folks who believed that Christians could be demon possessed.

Neil T. Anderson's books and teachings became common fair on the bookshelves in the dorms and many of his practices got adopted and promoted among the student body. On top of all this, I was exposed to two books of Christian fiction which were lighting the Christian world on fire, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness* by Frank Peretti. For some in the student body, these two books formed a manual for effective spiritual warfare. Other books managed to make their way through the student body. Who could possibly think they were equipped to do battle with demons if they had never read anything by supposed “former satanists” like Mike Warnke and Rebecca Brown?

I was also exposed to an audio tape which offered a methodology for spiritual warfare promising the salvation of loved ones for whom certain prayers were prayed. Who wouldn't want that? The tape laid out a methodology which included binding Satan, renouncing generational sins and curses, naming demons and binding them, praying a hedge of thorns, and pleading the blood of Jesus over people, places and things.

It all sounded good to me - for a while. I prayed the prayers, I plead the blood, I dutifully bound demons and rebuked Satan, thinking that I was well on my way to spiritual victory and true sanctification. I was waging *real* warfare! Or so I thought.

At the same time, I was learning in my classes about the sovereignty of God, the limitations that Satan has and what the Bible teaches about sanctification in the Christian life. For a long while I was able to compartmentalize my theology, not seeing that what I was

learning in the classroom did not mesh well with what I was practicing.

Now don't get me wrong, I was not some wacky charismatic demon hunter trying to cast demons out of every object. I wasn't performing exorcisms or seeing visions of demons or anything like that, but I had imbibed a theology of the demonic that did not mesh with Scripture. The day came when I finally realized that what I was learning from Scripture in my classes did not match what I was learning from these other books in my dorm.

It all started when I began to overhear discussions among the Fourth Year students about what they were learning in their class on Christian living, which that particular week covered the subject of spiritual warfare. They spoke of the amazing things they were learning, things they had never thought of before. Suddenly for them, the pieces were coming together and they were realizing that what they had believed for so long suddenly seemed so ridiculous and out of step with Scripture. They spoke of being liberated from so much superstition and fear.

I heard one student, whom I loved and respected, mention that “binding Satan” was a completely unbiblical practice. “What makes you say that?” I asked.

He began to share with me what he was learning in his class on spiritual warfare. Needless to say, it was a perspective and worldview to which I had not yet been exposed. I listened and offered up a few arguments and questions. I wasn't trying to refute him, but I did want some more information. What he was sharing seemed so simple, practical, and, above all, biblical. Nothing he said contradicted what I had learned in my classes. The light started to dawn and I began to see some contradictions in my own thinking.

I started to ask questions of some of the other Fourth Year students. Finally one of them said, “You just need to read the book.”

“What book?! How do I get my hands on this book?”

On his recommendation I made my way to the campus book store and bought *A Holy Rebellion* by Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr.<sup>6</sup> I **devoured** that book. I read and re-

6 I probably read that book 5 times before I was ever required to read it in Fourth Year. It contained all my notes, observations, highlighting and scribbles from all my study, research and meditation. It was so worn it was nearly falling apart! Subsequently, I lent it to someone and I can't remember who. So if you happen to be reading this, and you have my copy of *A Holy Rebellion*, please, please give it back!

read nearly ever chapter in a short period of time. I compared it to Scripture and found that unlike my previous theology of spiritual warfare, this book offered a perspective that fit with what I was learning from the Bible. I couldn't argue with it. I found myself saying, "Yeah, that's right. That makes so much sense. How come I didn't think of that? How could I not see that?"

Over the course of a couple of short months, I went through a radical reformation in my thinking. I came to understand that the Bible and the Bible alone serve as our guide in the area of spiritual warfare. I was liberated from a mystic, superstitious approach to spiritual warfare as suddenly as if a light had been turned on. I started to see as folly what I had **thought** was biblical. It all began to make sense.

I am well aware that among those who read this series of articles there will be some who long ago got over their preoccupation with the demonic. Like me, you once thought that **real** spiritual warfare consisted of doing hand-to-hand combat with demons to take back territory Satan had conquered. At one time your view of spiritual warfare had more in common with Frank Peretti's *This Present Darkness* than it had with anything you will read in this series. You left all that behind. Due to the teaching of Scripture through some means you came to understand that real spiritual warfare is not about **territory** but about **truth**. You will find this series encouraging, affirming, and equipping.

Some who read this series, I am sure, are still where I once was. You have been taught that spiritual warfare is about taking back **territory** from Satan. You have been instructed to pray a hedge of thorns, name demons and bind Satan. You have never thought through some of these things and never been challenged in your thinking. The fact that these things aren't taught in Scripture is going to be completely new to you. You have never questioned the assumptions or the practices that result from them. Much, if not all, of what I have to say will shock you and seem to come from left field.

Do one thing for me: **test it all by Scripture**. Go to the Scriptures and see if what I say from the text of the Bible

is true or not. Rightly interpret. Give due diligence. Think it through. Examine and test everything I say and everything you believe. Let the truth win.

Then there are some who will read this series of articles and you have never heard of binding Satan, pleading the blood, praying a hedge, territorial spirits, naming demons, or generational curses. This is all new to you. In that case, do one thing for me: **test it all by Scripture**. If you haven't heard of these things before, you will. You need to give some careful consideration to what the Bible teaches on these matters so you are not caught off guard or deceived.

Some will be encouraged. Some will feel a sense of liberation as old perspectives give way to a new approach to spiritual warfare; one they had never considered. Some will feel challenged in their thinking, and some, hopefully a small number, will be angry, feeling that their sacred cow has been lampooned. Some will feel like I am trying to rob them of their tools in the fight against evil. Actually, I am trying to equip you with tools, biblical tools.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

It is always a bit tricky at the beginning of any series to predict exactly how the next several articles will unfold. In a series such as this, with each passing month and the publication of every article, I will get asked questions, some of which I anticipate, others I do not. I always try to incorporate those questions into articles as the series evolves. Some subjects that I plan to address in one article will take two. I will try my best to be thorough and concise.

Here is my best guess at how I see this series taking shape. (I don't have titles for any of these yet!)

**Part 2:** We will deal with the sufficiency of Scripture in the realm of spiritual warfare. Can we and should we trust information that is gleaned from demons? Does the Bible offer to us all the information we need to wage the war in which we are enlisted? We will look at how to apply the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in the area of spiritual warfare.

**Part 3:** What does true spiritual warfare look like? Is it a battle over **territory** or is it a battle over **truth**? The answer might surprise you. We will see how Paul waged spiritual warfare in **2 Corinthians 10:3-6**.

**Part 4:** Getting to know our enemy. Who, or what is the Devil? What are demons? What can they do and what

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Subsequently, the book was republished under the title *Overrun By Demons: The Church's Preoccupation with the Demonic*. Now it is currently published under the title *What the Bible Teaches About Spiritual Warfare* by Kregel Publications.

can't they do? What is the Christian's main enemy and how do we fight it?

**Part 5:** Wrong warfare! We look at two very popular practices: binding Satan and praying a hedge of thorns.

**Part 6:** More wrong warfare: generational curses and territorial spirits.

**Part 7:** Yet more wrong warfare: naming demons, rebuking demons, and exorcisms.

**Part 8:** A look at spiritual warfare as described in Ephesians 6 - including the armor of God and what it means to put it on.

**Part 9:** Spiritual warfare and sanctification. We will answer questions like: Can a Christian be demon possessed? Can a Christian be oppressed by a demon? How should I pray? How do I get daily victory over the enemies of my soul?

The above outline is subject to change! I know that despite all my planning and good intentions, I have overlooked some things. There will be questions, I am sure. Please ask them! If you have them, others do too!

Let us test all things and hold fast to that which is true!  
**(1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)**

Without Wax-

