



Spiritual Warfare

Part 9: Wrong Warfare - Rebuking The Devil

by Jim Osman

Pastor/Teacher

Kootenai Community Church
kootenaichurch.org

Kim Riddlebarger wrote that there is “a new generation of Christians who are beginning to see the world [spiritual] through a grid that has more in common with Greek and Persian mystery religions than with Christianity.”¹ It is almost as if mysticism has been wedded with Christianity, resulting in some hybrid we might call Mystianity. In no area is this more evident than in the realm of spiritual warfare. The approach to spiritual warfare so uncritically embraced by the bulk of modern evangelicalism has more in common with pagan mysticism than anything biblical.

By this point, you have probably noticed that the approach I am advocating toward spiritual warfare is worlds apart from that which is practiced in most churches, taught by most pastors, and embraced by most spiritual warfare “experts.”² I believe that spiritual warfare is primarily a **truth war** that we wage against false ideologies by the proclamation of divine truth (**2 Cor. 10:3-5**). People are delivered, once and for all, from darkness to light through the gospel, not through repeated reciting of incantation-like prayers, renunciations, and mantras—however laden such phrases might be with Christian verbiage.

Sadly, the average Christian view of spiritual warfare involves hand-to-hand combat with demons as we storm the gates of hell, battle devils, and directly engage Satan and his hoard. This is done by verbally renouncing sin, curses, and demonic strongholds, praying a hedge of thorns, binding Satan through specific “binding prayers,” rebuking Satan, praying against territorial spirits, naming demons and, of course, a perennial favorite—exorcisms.³ We have already analyzed the practices of praying hedges, renouncing curses, and binding Satan. Now we turn our attention to “rebuking Satan.”

1 Chuck Colson, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, et. al., *Power Religion* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 278.

2 See all the previous parts in this series on Spiritual Warfare, available at www.kootenaichurch.org.

3 It is difficult not to notice how much emphasis falls on Satan and his demons with this approach. He very quickly becomes the focus of a believer's mind when so much effort is directed toward dealing with him.

What Is “Rebuking Satan?”

It is believed by many modern spiritual warfare teachers that the believer's authority in Christ provides us with power over Satan and demons. This power can be used to force demonic forces to obey our commands, just as they obeyed those of Jesus and the apostles. The emphasis that many place on “binding Satan” is one manifestation of this view of the believer's authority. Supposedly we can limit and stop Satan's activities with simple commands such as, “*I bind you, Satan, by the blood and name of Jesus Christ.*” It is also assumed that this authority gives believers the power to command and control demons during battle, to verbally rebuke the devil, to exorcise demons, and even to command the obedience of irrational and inanimate objects.

Spiritual warfare “expert”, Neil T. Anderson, advocates prayers that involve directly speaking to Satan *out loud*. In his book, *The Bondage Breaker*, Anderson argues that “*the Word of God is the only offensive weapon mentioned in the list of armor. Since Paul used thema instead of logos for “word” in Ephesians 6:17, I believe Paul is referring to the spoken Word of God instead of the Word of God personified in Jesus. We are to defend ourselves against the evil one by speaking aloud God's truth. . . . You can communicate with God in your mind and spirit because He knows the thoughts and intents of your heart (Hebrews 4:12). Your unspoken communion with God is your private sanctuary; Satan cannot eavesdrop on you. But by the same token, if you only tell Satan to leave with your thoughts, he won't leave because he can't hear you. **You must defeat Satan by speaking out.** The good news is that most attacks occur at night or when you are alone [this is good news?], so resisting Satan aloud seldom results in your having to explain to other people a vocal command instructing Satan to leave. However, there may be times when you will need to take a public stand against the enemy, which may include confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9).”⁴*

Anderson's treatment of Scripture in this section is lamentable. The “Word” of God in **Ephesians 6** is the Word which God has spoken and not the words that a believer speaks, and therefore

4 Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 84-85. Emphasis in the original.

has nothing to do with believers mentally or vocally repeating those words.

False teachers among the Word Faith Movement are well known for rebuking Satan and His demons and presuming the authority in Christ to command demons to heed their will. Benny Hinn, at his *Holy Spirit Miracle Cure* in Rome, Italy, said while supposedly healing a woman of cancer, “*We rebuke this spirit of cancer in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God. . . I command it to go out of her.*”⁵

A search online for “rebuking Satan” will reveal a host of deliverance-ministry teaching on the subject. For instance, Britt Merrick writes on his May 19, 2010, blog, “*When we are called upon to deal with demons while we are on mission for Christ, we should deal with them the same way that Christ did. Jesus verbally **commanded** demons to leave (Mark 5:8). Subsequently, we see the church in Acts following this same model (Acts 16:16-18). The model that we have set before us is the **verbal command and rebuke** of demons” (emphasis added). In attempting to answer the question, “Why does God ask us to speak directly to demons?” Merrick says, “*There is nothing in Scripture that indicates that demons can hear our thoughts, read our minds, or be conscious of our inner dialogue. [sic] We must rebuke them by **speaking out loud**. Jesus gave us authority to cast out demons in His name (Mark 16:17) and displayed for us the model of **verbally commanding** them*”⁶ (emphasis added).*

This is representative of the theology of various deliverance ministries and is widely accepted within charismatic circles.

I was surprised to find this theology applied in a very unique manner in a special issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs*. Richard Wurmbrand, founder of *The Voice of the Martyrs*, wrote an article entitled “*Rebuking the Devil.*”⁷ Wurmbrand believed that Christians have authority to command, bind, and rebuke devils. Beyond that, he attempted to prove that when we speak the Word of God in the name of Jesus, that whatever we speak to must obey our command, even if it is an inanimate object! He told a story to support his claim.

“American pastor Dick Eastman was much burdened about a thick wall that divided the capital of a civilized nation--the Berlin Wall erected by the Communists. Knowing that it separated families and friends, he pleaded with God: 'It is written that if we pray You should move a mountain, it will move. So many pray for this. Why don't You fulfill Your promise?'

5 Video available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uw-B7sEAO0>.

6 <http://brittmerrick.com/brittmerrick/?p=872>

7 Richard Wurmbrand, *The Voice of the Martyrs, Special Issue, 1994*. I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for Richard Wurmbrand and all that he has done to assist the persecuted church around the world and inform believers in free countries of the plight of our persecuted brethren. I have no doubt that Mr. Wurmbrand was a godly man who feared the Lord and served Him faithfully. I do, however, take issue with his approach to spiritual warfare, the practices he advocated, and his sad mishandling of Scripture in this particular issue of his publication.

*“One night Jesus replied, 'I never promised that I would move mountains if you pray. I said, "If you (not Me) say to this mountain, 'Move! It will move"' (Matthew 17:20). Don't come to Me. Speak to the Berlin Wall.”*⁸

*“Pastor Eastman went all the way to Berlin to convince the wall to crumble. It did not. He complained to Jesus, who replied, 'I did not say that you alone should do it. Take a few believers with you.’*⁹

“The pastor went to Berlin a second time in the company of a few more believers and commanded the Berlin Wall to crumble. The group made a sign of the cross on the stone before which they had spoken.

“After a few days the wall was no more. Germany was reunited.

“Many factors contributed to the destruction of the infamous wall, but who can deny that a word spoken to an inanimate object may play a decisive role?”

Actually, with all due respect, I would deny that! I don't believe for a moment that we have the power to affect inanimate objects by speaking God's Word to them. Taking Jesus' words about moving mountains in such a wooden, literal sense is to abuse His Word!

Later in that same article, Wurmbrand wrote, “*We too can speak to inanimate objects, even at great distances.*” One wonders then why Pastor Eastman had to fly to Germany--twice!

What possible biblical warrant could Wurmbrand offer for these teachings? He writes, “*Jesus commanded a tree to wither and it did. He commanded a storm to stop and there was peace.*

“But He did more than that. At one point He had a conversation with the Devil. What we have in Matthew 4 might be only a resume, when in essence Jesus quoted the Word to him, and he was forced to retreat. On another occasion He rebuked a devil who inhabited a child and the devil left him immediately (Matthew 17:18).

8 Notice that Eastman is claiming that Jesus spoke divine revelation to him concerning the meaning of a text in Scripture. Such direct revelation puts Eastman's claims above Scripture and beyond critique. After all, who are we to question what Jesus himself spoke to Dick Eastman? For my position on this type of extra-biblical divine revelation, please see my series on *Hearing the Voice of God*, available at kootenaichurch.org.

During my third year of Bible college, our class attended a large missions conference in Calgary, Alberta, at which Dick Eastman was the much-hyped keynote speaker. During one of the plenary sessions, I heard Eastman tell this very same story and make these same extraordinary claims, including that he was the instrument that God used to bring down the Berlin Wall!

9 Oh, if Jesus had only been more clear the first time that He spoke to Eastman! He could have saved some money on airfare! Why didn't Jesus make His will clear? Did Jesus forget to tell Eastman to take others? Of course, common sense dives right out the window when you accept by default that someone is receiving personal revelation from God.

*“Devils are intelligent beings. They understand what we say. **We too can make them obey our commands.** . . . If Jesus is living in us by His Spirit, **we too can command devils to depart**” (emphasis added).*

The assumption behind all of the above teaching is that if Jesus did something while here on earth, we too, have authority to do the same. If Jesus spoke to a storm and calmed the sea, then we can speak to objects and command their obedience to our wills.¹⁰ I wonder, then, why Mr. Wumbrand and Dick Eastman do not multiply bread and fish to feed the hungry multitudes all over the world. Why wouldn't either of them travel to the persecuted church and speak the Word of God to prison doors and prison guards, and free Christians held in chains? After all, that would be the logical conclusion of this theology.

Jesus performed signs which were intended to attest to His messianic claims. Such signs were the prerogative of the incarnate Son of God and never intended to be the norm for believers of every age. It is a sad abuse of the biblical texts to suggest that these things are examples for believers to follow today.¹¹

Spiritual warfare expert Mark Bubeck shares a personal story of an encounter he had with a demon that was supposedly oppressing his daughter Judy and causing sickness and nausea. Once Bubeck was convinced that the problem was not psychosomatic but demonic, he decided that the best approach was to *“work directly against these afflicting powers.”*¹²

After reading Scriptures which *“speak of our great victory and the power of our Lord over all of Satan's kingdom”*¹³ they prayed. Bubeck then recalls, *“At this point I began to **command** for the powers of darkness afflicting her to come to manifestation. I **called them** before her faculties and **commanded** them to answer my questions.”*¹⁴ He then recalls praying, *“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I **command Satan and all wicked spirits** who do not have specific assignment against Judy to leave our presence. We do not allow any interference or intrusion into our warfare against the powers of darkness afflicting Judy. I **command** all powers of darkness afflicting Judy to be **bound** aside. You may not work. You may not hurt her in any way. There is to be one-way traffic, out of Judy's life and to the place where the Lord Jesus Christ sends you. You may never return to afflict Judy. I **call you** before Judy's faculties. You **must answer** my questions by giving clear answers through her mind. You **may not** speak otherwise. I want no talk from you but answers to my*

*questions. I **command the chief power of darkness** in charge of this affliction of fear, nausea, and all related problems to come to attention. I **call you to account** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is your name?”*¹⁵

This was followed by conversation with demons which revealed a supposed “hierarchy” of demonic powers involved in this affliction.

After being sufficiently convinced that the demons were fully exposed, Bubeck *“proceeded to **command their departure**”* with prayers like, *“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I bind you all together. I bind all workers and helpers together. . . . I **command** you to go where the Lord Jesus Christ sends you. I **command** you to go now.”*¹⁶

Rebuking the devil is presented as a quick and effective answer to temptation. When the Devil tempts you to sin, we are told to rebuke the demon of “lust,” “alcohol,” “depression,” “homosexuality,” “pornography,” “worry,” or “gossip.”¹⁷ Deliverance from darkness or sin can be effected for family members when we rebuke the devil. The same theology that leads one to attempt to “bind Satan,” also teaches that by rebuking the devil, we can cause him to flee or cower away from us. So it is not uncommon in Christian circles to hear pastors and teachers rebuke Satan and command he and his demons to leave or cease their activities. It is believed that if Jesus rebuked Satan and his demons (**Mark 1:25; Matt. 17:18**), we can also command Satan in Jesus' name and he will be obligated to obey our commands.

Is “rebuking Satan” mentioned in Scripture? Yes, it is. But not in the way favorable to the theology of modern spiritual warfare teachers.

2 Peter and False Teachers

Peter wrote his second epistle primarily to warn about the false teachers that would be secretly introducing destructive heresies and denying the Master (**2:1-3**). Peter wanted to prepare his readers to stand against the very real threat of wicked, ungodly men whose doctrines posed a grave threat to the truth and the health of the church.

In the middle of describing these men and their teachings, Peter reminds his readers that **“the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.”** (**2:9-11**)¹⁸

Like the Devil, who is their father, these false teachers show

10 This is eerily similar to the theology of the Word Faith Movement that causes teachers like Kenneth and Gloria Copeland to claim the ability to command weather and storms to obey them.

11 The same assumption lies behind the belief that we should be conducting exorcisms. If Jesus and the Apostles exorcised demons, then we also should be actively engaged in bold confrontations with the forces of darkness. We will deal with exorcisms in a future article.

12 Mark I. Bubeck, *The Adversary: The Christian Versus Demon Activity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 120.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 120-121. Emphasis added to demonstrate the theology of “commanding” obedience from demons.

16 Ibid. 121-122. Emphasis added.

17 We will deal with the subject of whether these sins are the result of demons or not in a future article.

18 **2 Peter 2:9-13** (NASB 95 Update)

their self-centered arrogance. Their **self-willed** presumption and their reckless **daring** are seen in the fact that **“they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties”** (v. 10). The word translated “revile” in the passage is *blasphemeo*, from which we get our English word *blaspheme*. It means “to slander” or to “speak lightly or profanely of sacred things.” The “angelic majesties” in this context are demons (cf. **Jude 8**), who are “majesties”¹⁹ in the sense that they possess a transcendent, supernatural being beyond what humans do.²⁰

These false teachers, in their brash rejection of authority, presumed that they were greater than fallen angels, able to control them, and so spoke reviling evil of them. These are contrasted with angels, who are far greater in power and might than a mere man. Yet, even though the righteous and holy angels do not rebuke, revile, and speak evil of Satan and his demons, false teachers do! Their reckless presumption is that they, mere fallen men, have power and authority over demons to command and control them. Sound familiar?

Peter goes on to describe these reckless false teachers as being **“like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, . . .”** (2:12). They speak evil of things of which they are ignorant.

Jude Agrees

Jude also wrote to warn Christians about false teachers. Those false teachers that Peter had warned *would come* into the church, Jude notes, *had come* into the church (v. 4). Jude's description of these false teachers is very similar to Peter's. In fact, Jude notes the same rejection of authority and reviling of angelic majesties that Peter warned about, saying, **“Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.”**²¹

Like Peter, Jude notes the rejection of authority which is endemic among false teachers. Again, we see that their arrogant presumption is demonstrated when they **“revile angelic majesties.”** Jude uses the very same words as Peter to describe this act of rebuking, reviling, and speaking evil of fallen angels.²²

19 The Greek word is *doxa* which means “glories.”

20 John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Peter & Jude* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005) 98.

21 **Jude 8–10** (NASB 95 Update).

22 “Although it is possible to interpret the word [*doxa*, “glories” or “majesties”] as a reference to God's majesty, the translation “angelic majesties” is best in light of the parallel passage in Peter's epistle” (MacArthur, 174).

Though Peter noted that holy angels, even from their exalted, mighty, and glorious position, do not revile their fallen counterparts, Jude offers a very concrete example in Michael, the archangel. Michael apparently was given charge over the body of Moses (**Deut. 34:5-6**) when Moses died. If not for this passage in Jude, we would not know that there was a contention between Michael and Satan over Moses' body. Jude notes that when this happened, Michael **“did not dare to bring a railing judgment”** against Satan. Instead, Michael knew that only the Sovereign Lord was in a position to rebuke, control, or command Satan. Michael submitted to the Lord rather than **“dare”** to rebuke Satan and revile him.

Who Do You Think You Are?

What God's highest holy angel would not dare to do, sinful, fallen men presume the authority to do. It is unthinkable. I have heard Christians say, “Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus,” and I wonder, “Who do you think you are?” Rebuking, commanding, or ridiculing the devil are not tools of effective spiritual warfare; they are marks of prideful, arrogant, self-willed false teachers. If you listen to false teachers like Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, and Jesse Duplantis²³, you will hear them constantly ridicule, rebuke, and taunt the devil. These men are not masters of the art of spiritual warfare; they are unreasoning beasts reviling in their ignorance, rushing headlong into error and judgment.

Does that mean that every Christian who has uttered such phrases is a false teacher? No, certainly not. Some people are simply mistaken about the nature of spiritual warfare and the nature of the enemy. They are acting out of ignorance. As Peter says, they are **“reviling where they have no knowledge.”** Jude says they **“revile the things which they do not understand.”** I believe that explains much of the misguided attempts at confronting forces of darkness. “This is an example of ignorance of God's Word leading to wrong practice in the area of spiritual warfare.”²⁴

Since we have, not one, but two stern warnings against such practices, we have to ask, “Why would anyone want to engage in such behavior? What makes us think that we have more might, more power, than Michael the archangel?”

More Problems To Note

Apart from the fact that we are warned about such bold, brash confrontation with fallen angels, there are a number of other problems with this practice.

First, we don't have a single positive example of such practices in the early church. In fact, we do have a negative example of some who presumed such authority, but without divine warrant—the sons of Sceva in **Acts 19:11-20**. Luke records this

23 And their ilk!

24 Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, *A Holy Rebellion: The Church's New Preoccupation with the Demonic* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 168.

episode so that none would arrogantly assume that the extraordinary miracles performed by Paul (like exorcisms--**Acts 19:11**) were to be done by every believer. Aside from Jesus and the apostles, we do not have any record of such bold confrontation of demonic powers being practiced in the church.

In fact, Paul himself did not model this type of handling of demonic powers when he was afflicted by his thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan sent to torment him (**2 Cor. 12:7-10**). Paul did not bind the devil, rebuke the satanic emissary, cast Satan down, revile him, or otherwise confront the spirit behind the thorn.²⁵

The apostolic example is that of resisting the devil (**1 Peter 5:9**) and standing (**Eph. 6:10-14**), not binding and rebuking. Not only does the New Testament not provide us any examples of Christians handling the devil in this manner, there is not even a single command or instruction on rebuking the devil. The emphasis of the epistles rests on the victory which has *already been won at Calvary*, resisting, and standing.

Second, this produces a misdirected focus. God should be the focus of our prayers, not devils. It does not even seem wise that we should direct our attention and prayers toward commanding, rebuking, or addressing demons. The believer's focus in prayer should be the glories of God, the nature of Christ, and the work of the Triune God in His self-glorification. This approach to spiritual warfare places the emphasis on the devil and his activities--something I am sure he enjoys.

We do not see similar emphasis and misdirected focus in the writings of the apostles or in the life of the early church. In all the recorded prayers of the apostles and the early Christians, we do not find a single example of rebuking Satan or demons.

Third, far too much is made of the power of Satan and the authority of the believer. Satan is a defeated foe (**Hebrews 2:14-15; Colossians 2:15**). This is not to suggest that we should not take the threat he possesses seriously. We should (**1 Peter 5:8-9**). However, modern spiritual warfare teachers give him far *too much* credit. Further, they make far too much out of the "authority" that comes with being a believer. Though we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (**Ephesians 2:6**), that positional privilege does not give us miracle-working power equivalent to Jesus and the apostles.

Fourth, the God-given method for dealing with temptation is to take the way of escape which God provides (1 Corinthians 10:13), not rebuking demons supposedly behind the temptation. There is no quick fix for temptation. We must resist it, endure it, and flee from it. We grow in holiness as we learn to yield our members as instruments of righteousness and not to sin (**Romans 6:12-23**). Rebuking a devil does not make temptation go away. We are tempted by our flesh and led astray through our lusts (**James 1:14**). The teaching on "rebuking Satan" as a means of sanctification and victorious Christian living thwarts God's sanctification process. This errant theology teaches that victory over temptation is achieved through a correct verbal formula (I bind/rebuke you Satan, in the name of Jesus) rather

than through correct moral choices and denying the flesh. Rather than viewing temptation as something to be dealt with by making wise and moral choices, this teaching adopts a ritualistic response more in keeping with a mystical/magical worldview.

Summary

We dare not be rebuking demons! This is a completely unnecessary, unbiblical, and unwise practice. We are not commanded to wage the truth war in this fashion. Like the practices of binding Satan, praying hedges, and renouncing curses, rebuking demons is a tool that God has not put in our arsenal. It is a completely man-made tactic which appeals to the pride of our flesh. Satan does not fear our useless incantations. Let's abandon them for the proclamation of the truth!

Without Wax-



²⁵ As you saw we are instructed to do by Mark Bubeck earlier.