



**SPIRITUAL WARFARE
AND
VICTORY
IN CHRIST**

BILL RUDGE

Spiritual Warfare
and
Victory in Christ

by Bill Rudge

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Spiritual Warfare and Victory in Christ

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by Bill Rudge

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The Arena

Look into a night sky and you will see a vast array of stars. Realize, however, that there are also billions of stars in billions of galaxies unseen by the naked eye. Likewise, the Bible makes known that there is an unseen spiritual realm.

As soon as you give your life to Jesus Christ, you enter the arena of spiritual warfare. Your former peaceful coexistence with the forces of darkness terminates. Colossians 1:13 states—

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

During the early part of my ministry, I spent many years researching and sharing Christ with mediums, trance channelers, psychics, witches, satanists, voodoo witch doctors, and those in the New Age movement and Eastern mysticism. As well as leading several to Christ, I also had many hexes and spells placed on me and threats made against my life.

I encountered numerous people who, as a result of either mere dabbling or deep involvement in the occult, experienced great bondage and fear. Many testified of supposedly encountering spirit beings, seeing objects move, sensing a mysterious presence, being touched by something, hearing unexplained noises and voices, or witnessing other bizarre phenomena. The eyewitnesses and evidence provided no reasonable explanation other than the biblical accounts of demonic beings.

TWO WITCH DOCTORS NOSE TO NOSE

Picture this scene which occurred during a mission trip to Haiti...Jacques, the former witch doctor (who is now a Christian), sits nose to nose with Pierre, another notorious witch doctor, and shares the Gospel with him. They are sitting in the same arena where the cockfights occur...how symbolic—the power of God versus the power of Satan.

The background for this setting: A Salvation Army pastor invited me to speak at his church. Before the evening service, we heard the commotion of a nearby cockfight. Men using drugs and alcohol were betting on the roosters. We invited them to come to church. Shortly before I began to speak, the cockfight ended and men walked by the church. Some came inside. I said, “Just as one of the roosters had to shed its blood so some of you could win money, Christ shed His blood and died for our sins so that we could gain eternal life.”

After the service someone asked if I wanted to meet the voodoo witch doctor. The young man led me (followed by several team members) down a dark path to where the cockfight was held. I soon discovered that the same man I had met earlier, who was in charge of the cockfight and the gambling arena, was the witch doctor. His name was Pierre. He had some of his men put chairs in a circle in the middle of the pit for us to sit on—where the cockfight had occurred just a few hours before. Many people gathered to listen. As I shared with him he listened intently. Then Jacques came in. When Pierre saw Jacques, his face lit up. Pierre had great respect for Jacques because he had heard about him. The two of them were in the middle of our circle (just as the roosters had been previously), debating back and forth as Jacques shared about Christ and Pierre responded why he could not give his life to Christ.

The grace of God and the power of His Spirit were at work as we gathered to pray in the very same circle as the cockfights. Now we were fighting in the heavenly realm for the salvation of these dear people who were being held as slaves in the kingdom of darkness.

After we finished our meeting, I had everyone stand in a large circle to have prayer that the Lord would protect Pierre and bring him to salvation. Pierre indicated that what we were saying was true, but he was in so deep with Satan (voodoo rituals, gambling, cockfight arena, alcohol and drugs, etc.) that he could not give his life to Christ yet. With downcast eyes his words were, “I owe the devil too much.” I trust he will one day give his life to Christ since he had been so receptive to hear the Gospel.

MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

Many Christians talk a good fight and brag about all the power they have and how the name of Jesus is superior to Satan, but when it comes to engaging in spiritual warfare with the forces of darkness, most are powerless and ineffective and run away in fear. Many young people and adults have left churches and rejected the God of the Bible because the Christians they saw and the church they were raised in were impotent and not relevant. Desiring power, many get involved in some aspect of the occult. However, if they knew the Christ that I know and were walking in the power of His Spirit and the full potential of His Word, then they would never abandon the resurrected Christ.

We are in the midst of the most intense spiritual warfare in history. There is a growing spirit of rebellion and wickedness in the world, as well as apostasy and deception in the church. Satan knows his time is short and is intensifying his efforts to seduce the world and wage war against the saints. Scripture indicates that we will see increased and unrepentant sorcery and demonic activity as we draw closer to Christ’s return. The days prior to the Lord’s coming are especially treacherous because of the proliferation of evil and demonic deception.

During my early ministry days, I found myself so absorbed in researching the cults, occult, and the New Age movement that I spent more time reading books and magazines dealing with these subjects than I did God’s Word. However, after a time of intense prayer and fasting and

extensive Scripture study, I made a commitment to read His Word and pray three times a day. Except for valuable resource material, I gave most of my books away. It has proven to be one of the most beneficial decisions I have ever made.

The writers of the New Testament frequently used military terminology: soldier of Christ, armor of God, fiery darts, shield of faith, sword of the Spirit. These and many other such terms describe the spiritual warfare in which the believer is engaged.

Before we further explore this topic, I want to emphasize that learning about our enemy and spiritual warfare is like going through boot camp. It is essential to learn what is taught there, but once you do, you can then focus on what you were trained to do. Likewise, in spiritual warfare, once you know the strategies and techniques of the hostile spiritual powers, you can focus on reaching the world for Christ and equipping believers to walk in faithfulness and endurance until He returns. When opposition arises from hostile spiritual forces, scripturally deal with them as you continue to keep your focus on the Lord and His Word.

Know Your Enemy

Victory in spiritual warfare is realized by committed believers who know their enemy, are aware of his objectives and strategies, and understand how to exercise the authority and power delegated to them by Christ.

First, let us discover who our enemy is. The Bible clearly reveals that there is a devil. We meet him in Genesis 3 and continue to read of him all the way to Revelation 20. He was endowed with beauty and wisdom and a superior position of authority in God's creation. Pride and rebellion caused his fall and his becoming Satan (the adversary). The once harmonious universe fell into disharmony. Satan and the angels who joined his rebellion (known as evil spirits or demons) now attempt to oppose the plan and purpose of God. The angels who rebelled with Satan appear to be divided into two main categories. One group of demons is active in our world today, while another group is already imprisoned (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Luke 8:31).

We can learn a great deal about who Satan is by looking at some of the different names and descriptions of him throughout Scripture, such as:

- accuser (Revelation 12:10)
- adversary (1 Peter 5:8)
- deceiver (Revelation 12:9; 20:3)
- devil (slanderer) (Matthew 4:1; 13:39; Ephesians 4:27; Revelation 12:9; 20:2)
- dragon (Revelation 12:3,7,9; 20:2)
- evil one (Matthew 13:19,38; Ephesians 6:16; 1John 5:18)
- god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- liar (John 8:44)
- murderer (John 8:44)
- roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8)
- ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)
- Satan (adversary) (Zechariah 3:1; Matthew 4:10; Revelation 12:9; 20:2)
- serpent (Genesis 3:1; Revelation 12:9; 20:2)
- tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5)

SATAN DOESN'T FIGHT FAIR

Before I was a Christian my friends and I did not always fight fair. We would use any means to win a fight, such as sucker punching a foe as he tried to take off his jacket to fight, throwing dirt in his eyes, ganging up on him, or even using weapons. Sometimes I would say, “Hey, there’s the police!” or “There’s your mother!” When he would turn his head to look, I would hit him. We used many other strategies to defeat and intimidate our opponents.

So, too, Satan and the principalities and powers and rulers of darkness do not play fair. They often hit at your most vulnerable point and weakest time. The devil tempted Christ in the wilderness at the end of His 40-day fast when He hungered (Luke 4:2,3). The devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He and his cohorts are full of deceit. They are enemies of all righteousness and make crooked the straight ways of the Lord (Acts 13:10). Satan even incites people to use physical force and violence against God’s people in an attempt to prevent them from sharing the Gospel, and to conceal his diabolical deceptions.

The apostle Paul acknowledges in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 how Satan hindered him—

For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.

However, in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul relates his confidence in the One who brings ultimate victory—

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you.

Some of Satan’s strategies, techniques, and abilities are revealed in the following verses:

- He has power to perform signs and false wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9).
- He will deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9).
- He disguises himself as an angel of light
- (2 Corinthians 11:14).
- He twists God’s Word (Genesis 3:1-5).
- He roams about on the earth (Job 1:7).
- He prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).
- He can cause physical sickness (Job 2:7; Luke 13:16).
- He blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Corinthians 4:4).

- He hinders believers (1 Thessalonians 2:18).
- He accused Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:1).
- He stood against Israel and incited David to sin against the Lord (1 Chronicles 21:1,8).
- He tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:1).
- He desired to sift Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31).
- He put betrayal of Christ into the heart of Judas (John 13:2).
- He entered into Judas (John 13:27).
- He filled the heart of Ananias to lie (Acts 5:3).
- He cast some into prison (Revelation 2:10).

But he can be resisted (James 4:7) and overcome (1 John 2:13; Revelation 12:11). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ triumphed over principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) and rendered powerless him who had the power of death—that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14). After Satan is bound and thrown into the bottomless pit for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2,3), he will be released to deceive the nations one last time (Revelation 20:7,8). He will then be thrown in the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever and ever in the eternal fire prepared for him and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

PERFORMS COUNTERFEIT MIRACLES

The ability of Satan-inspired prophets to perform “miraculous signs” is attested to in the Bible.

Matthew 24:24—

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10—

Then that lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed...the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Revelation 13:13—

He [False Prophet] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.

Revelation 16:14—

...for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

Revelation 19:20—

And the beast [Antichrist] was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image....

Spectacular miracles in themselves, therefore, are not evidence that it is the Holy Spirit at work. Deuteronomy 13:1-4—

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

Distinguishing between the genuine and counterfeit is sometimes difficult, but not impossible. Believers in Christ must have discernment (1 John 4:1-3; Hebrews 5:14), which is developed through studying Scripture and prayer.

SATAN’S OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

In attempting to be like the Most High, one of Satan’s main objectives is to receive worship. During his temptation of Jesus, Satan unsuccessfully tried to entice Jesus to worship him (Matthew 4:9,10). Scripture reveals that during the last days the Antichrist, who receives his authority from Satan, will proclaim himself to be God and seek control over and worship from every human being on earth (2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13).

Satan gives superficial blessings, temporary pleasures, and counterfeit power to some, while for others he uses fear and intimidation. His basic motivation, however, is always the same: to enslave, control, and receive worship.

Many people in the occult start out by developing powers that they think are latent within them. They eventually progress to having entities or disembodied spirits manifest—some even think it is Satan himself. In the beginning they believe they control these powers and spirit beings, but as they continue in the realm of the occult, they eventually discover that they are no longer in control. These entities, which they may have thought were benevolent aliens, angels, departed loved ones, or even Jesus Christ, begin to control and interfere with their lives and ultimately enslave them.

When you realize that Satan's strategy of using deception by giving temporary pleasures and powers is in order to accomplish his goal to control, enslave, and receive worship, then all of the phenomena that occurs in the occult dimension begin to make sense.

Revelation 9:1-11 is a vivid description of unrestrained demonic activity on the earth during the Tribulation. Those who are involved in sorcery, magic arts, idolatry, occultism, and New Age practices would do well to consider this account of the demonic beings released from the abyss. The true intent of Satan and his demonic cohorts is to inflict harm, torture, and destruction on human beings—even those in allegiance with them.

The satanic principalities and powers were defeated at the cross (John 12:31; 16:11; Colossians 2:15), but they continue their evil deception and influences in the present age (Ephesians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8,9; Revelation 2:10), until they are stripped of all power at Christ's return.

Some of Satan's and his cohorts' activities are intended to advance and build his kingdom, while at other times his operation is designed to sabotage and disorganize God's kingdom. His main objective is to keep people from coming to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. He relentlessly tries to hinder people from accepting the Gospel. This is the heart of spiritual warfare and why it is so crucial that prayer accompanies witnessing and evangelistic outreaches.

When Satan's efforts to impede people from coming to Christ fail, he attempts to cause them to dishonor the Lord and rebel, thereby rendering them powerless and neutralizing their effectiveness. This alternative strategy of Satan is to make believers in Christ weak and vulnerable by luring them into compromise—usually sexual immorality or false teaching. He hopes believers will give up in frustration and defeat and not achieve the purpose and potential God has for them, nor be conformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

Many people wonder why their prayers are not answered; why they do not have discernment; why they do not walk in victory. Oftentimes, it is because Satan has seduced them into compromising lifestyles, willful sin and rebellion, thus quenching God's Spirit in their lives. The only solution is repentance and obedience.

DIVERSIONS

When we ministered on U.S. bases in Germany, Lieutenant Colonel Doug Mastriano and his wife and son were our hosts. During some free time between speaking engagements they took my wife and me to Paris to do some historical research and also to visit the Argonne in France to document Sergeant York's amazing exploit during World War I. While on a subway train in Paris, a youth stood near us playing the accordion. He was a diversion so his companions could discover the location of our wallets. Rebbie shares the following account and insight—

Traveling the subway in Paris has opened my eyes to just how quickly evil can overtake us and rob us. I was traveling with four others and had somewhat of a false sense of security from being in a group...although I thought I was still being pretty cautious. In a second, disaster can strike. Our stop came and we all began filing off the train. Everyone else was in front of me and my son dropped something and then stooped to pick it up. In that split second someone opened my purse and stole my wallet. All this happened without me ever feeling a thing! By the time I realized what had happened, the doors closed and the train sped away. Cash, credit cards, ID information and more were lost....

Likewise, Satan uses many diversions to accomplish his real objectives. He uses alluring temptations in an attempt to divert our focus and steal our most precious treasure—our uncompromised allegiance to Christ as Lord.

LURE OF THE WORLD

Satan's primary focus and relentless attack is against our personal integrity. He uses lies and accusations. He seeks to tempt, entice, and lure us from pure devotion to Christ. He knows that a corrupted believer is an ineffective tool for the Lord in the battle against spiritual darkness.

Satan's main device is sexual enticement, but he knows all our vulnerabilities and past weaknesses, whether they are pride, impatience, fear, jealousy, greed, lust, etc. He will use any vice we have to seduce and compromise us. He waits for the right opportunity to entice us and creates circumstances that will lead to our demise. Only by submitting to God and resisting Satan's alluring, yet often seemingly innocent temptations, can we avoid untold misery and walk in victory.

Scripture reveals that in the last days, during the Tribulation, people will refuse to repent of sexual immorality. That means the world will be given over to lust and every sexual perversion imaginable (Revelation 9:20,21).

The lure of the world through television, movies, videos, the Internet, music, magazines, and books is a prime means to infect believers with worldly philosophy, which is often diametrically opposed to God's revelation of truth.

When attempts to compromise your thoughts, attitudes, and lifestyle are unsuccessful, the hostile spiritual forces target your family or workplace to provoke and raise up people and circumstances to oppose and undermine you. They also target your health or that of loved ones. Maintaining personal integrity before God and the world, trusting the Lord no matter what, and standing strong in the midst of the storm are crucial in overcoming the strategies of the enemy.

Scripture Condemns Sorcery

Many years ago I warned about the growing influence of occultism in the church. One of my newsletter articles, entitled *Witchcraft Infiltrates Churches*, revealed how several Christians were involved with a woman who was involved with witchcraft and spiritualism. The strategy of this woman, who professed to be a Spirit-filled Christian, was to infiltrate a church or ministry. She would quote extensively from Scripture, enabling her to subtly seduce immature Christians into occult philosophy and practices.

Far more subtle and harmful, however, is the fact that today many Christian leaders, obviously lacking scriptural knowledge and discernment, are bringing New Age teachings and Eastern mysticism into the church.

Several years ago one of my staff and I met with a man who was pastor of an occult-oriented church and was also recognized as one of the top ten psychics in the eastern U.S. He was certain his “gift” of divination and fortune-telling was from God. After an hour-long meeting, I strongly cautioned him that his beliefs and practices were not of God, but were the occultism condemned in Deuteronomy 18:10,11 and elsewhere throughout Scripture. I believe the Lord sent us to him as his final warning and to call him to repentance. In spite of the biblical evidence we shared with him, he refused to discontinue his occult involvement. A short time later, he died of a heart attack at a young age.

A sad indictment against the last days generation is a refusal to repent of sorcery, worshipping demons, and idolatry—which means occultism and demonic phenomena will become very prominent (Revelation 9:20,21).

It is impossible to read Scripture and not come to the realization that any and all forms of sorcery and occultism are condemned by God. The following are just a few examples:

Deuteronomy 18:9-12—

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you.

Leviticus 19:26,31—

You shall not...practice divination or soothsaying. Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.

2 Chronicles 33:6,9—

He [King Manasseh] made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger. Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.

For a most interesting and insightful account of King Manasseh's wickedness and judgment, then his repentance and restoration, read 2 Chronicles 33:1-17.

In 2 Kings 23:1-25 we read of the reform made by righteous King Josiah, grandson of King Manasseh. Judah was infiltrated and entrenched with idolatry and occultism, but after the Book of the Law was found in the Temple and read by Josiah, he began an aggressive campaign to cleanse the land and the people. Verses 24 and 25 of 2 Kings chapter 23 conclude the details of the biblical account of this reform—

Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

CONFESS OCCULT PRACTICES

In the first century A.D., Ephesus was a center for magical beliefs and practices, worship of Artemis, and a variety of other mystery and astrological beliefs. Many of the Ephesian converts to Christianity came from this background of magic and mysticism. Acts 19:17-20 records the following account—

...and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

Many of the Ephesian converts previously trusted in magic and mysticism for protection from, and power over, evil spirits or to gain an advantage over other people. In contrast, the apostle Paul taught them that the true power of God not only would enable them to overcome all the powers of darkness, but also would enable them to love others as Christ loved them. This power of God was not received through invoking and manipulating spirits (by reciting magical words and names), but through faith in, and authority from, Jesus Christ.

ZERO TOLERANCE

Scripture clearly reveals that God has zero tolerance for sorcery and idolatry.

Revelation 21:8 emphatically states—

But for the...sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Revelation 22:14,15 says—

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers....

God alone is our Creator and He must be the only One we seek for supernatural knowledge, wisdom, and power. He proclaims that there is no other God but Him and that He is a jealous God (Exodus 20:3; Joshua 24:19). To Him alone do we bow down, submit our will, dedicate our heart, and offer our praise. If we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (instead of magic), all other things will be added (things of real value instead of counterfeits).

The Need for Balance

I had an opportunity to do a ride-along with my son-in-law of the California Highway Patrol. The Sergeant who was briefing the officers introduced me. He informed them that I signed a form releasing the state of California from any responsibility or liability and therefore they could “have at me” and shoot me or whatever since I had no rights. Although he was only joking, the sad reality is that when through disobedience and rebellion we step outside of God’s will and protection, Satan can “have at us.”

It has been said that human beings are defended castles and have a wall of protection sheltering them from the demonic realm. However, dabbling in the occult lets down the drawbridge and opens the door to the spirit world. Those who step outside God’s protection and willingly violate and disregard clear biblical truth concerning this had better repent.

Christians who purposely or ignorantly dabble in practices and techniques forbidden by Scripture or fill their minds with occultism through movies, music, fantasy role-playing games, etc., are no more immune to demonic oppression than Christians involved in sexual immorality are immune to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. If you mess in Satan’s territory, he will get you in some capacity of your life. I am convinced, however, that true believers in Christ seeking to live totally for the Lord cannot be demon possessed.

John 14:23—

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

1 Corinthians 6:19—

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

2 Corinthians 6:14-16—

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I

will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

1 John 4:4—

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.

Revelation 12:10,11—

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

The enemy may tempt, test, and oppose believers—but never possess committed believers in Jesus Christ. There is no biblical account of a true believer in Christ being demon possessed.

DESTROY BANNED ITEMS

Early in our ministry my wife and I learned a valuable lesson. A mother brought to me various items her teenage son had used during Satan worship. She wanted the items out of her house and did not care what we did with them.

I immediately threw out the black candles and other objects which were obviously intended for occult purposes, but we thought it would be wasteful to discard the crystal bell and brass cup. We reasoned that we could give them away or sell them and give the money to the ministry.

During my Bible study a few days later I read Deuteronomy 7:25,26—

The graven images of their gods you are to burn [destroy] with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. You shall not bring an abomination into your house...you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is something banned.

Just as I was on my way to destroy the items, my wife Karen mentioned to me that during prayer she felt strongly led of the Lord that we should get rid of them. I shared with her what the Lord had just shown me through Scripture and we immediately destroyed these items.

It is crucial that we do not possess or participate in anything directly or indirectly associated with the occult—books, movies, music, games, jewelry, healing techniques, rituals, and so on. Do not give the forces of darkness opportunity to afflict or harass you because you are entangled in forbidden practices. Do not foolishly identify and associate with beliefs and practices contrary to God's revelation of truth. Do not give Satan opportunity to claim that you are still yielded to him and his regime, thereby giving him the right to oppress you.

LADY RETURNS TO OCCULTISM

A woman who was supposedly led to Christ by a pastor gave him all her occult books, Tarot cards, and other occult paraphernalia. He in turn gave them to our research director. A short while later this woman estimated these items to be worth hundreds of dollars, so she asked for them back. "Besides," she said, "many of them were given to me by very special friends."

We warned her not to take them back because they would ensnare and destroy her, but she refused to listen. She attempted to justify her decision by promising not to read or use them.

Within a month she started reading the occult literature again, and shortly thereafter she began doing seances and reading Tarot cards. "Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). She had been very active and vivacious, with a youthful appearance, but from this time on she quickly degenerated physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Her sister-in-law told me that she ended up in a rest home at the early age of 53. She had broken her hip twice and also had become severely depressed, fearful, and paranoid. Her mind would come and go, and she often emitted a high eerie shriek. She weighed only 80 pounds, but had great strength. When she put her arm around her sister-in-law, the clasp was so tight that the nurses needed help to release her.

She died a few years after returning to her occultism. A pastor visited her about a month before she passed away and said she was in complete bondage. Unable to talk or respond, she just wildly stared about. He said she ended up being physically debilitated, mentally deranged, and spiritually degenerate.

DELIVERANCE OR DISCIPLINE

While it is true that demonic beings can be responsible for some physical, emotional, and spiritual problems, they are not necessarily always the direct cause. Many problems are the result

of people reaping the consequences of what they have sown—disobedience or negligence concerning the principles in God’s Word.

It should not be surprising that many people like to blame everything on Satan. Since the beginning of human history, we have been blaming others for our problems. After Adam ate the forbidden fruit, God confronted him, but Adam blamed it all on Eve. Eve blamed it on the serpent. Both were blaming God indirectly, for He had created them.

Many today blame their alcohol and drug usage, gluttony, lust, sexual immorality, tempers, and other such behavior on Satan. We must, however, assume responsibility for our actions instead of blaming everything on the devil. Galatians 5:19-21 indicates that immorality, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, envying, drunkenness, and things like these are “deeds of the flesh.”

In most cases, what is needed more than instant deliverance from demonic influence is a consistent life of discipline and self-control. While most people would rather have quick and easy solutions to their problems, God’s way often requires time, effort, and obedience.

On the other hand, we must not ignore clear biblical teaching concerning the reality of Satan and evil spirits. Ephesians 6:12 states—

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.

We must be cautious of overemphasis and sensationalism concerning supposed demonic activity and deliverance that occurs in many circles. We must also realize that many of the phenomena attributed to evil spirits are identified inaccurately. Nevertheless, we must remain aware of the reality of the demonic realm and use discernment.

BALANCE IS CRUCIAL

During my years of research, I met many people who had seemingly demonic encounters.

- A young woman struggled with apparitions of menacing beings that instructed her to kill her husband and children.
- A high school student who was fascinated with Nazism heard a voice telling him to get books on Satanism. For months afterward he slept on the couch downstairs because he was terrorized by the being that appeared in his bedroom at night.
- College students residing in a mansion formerly used for occult rituals told of seeing apparitions, hearing voices, doors banging, and other unexplainable phenomena.

- An older woman saw and heard her deceased husband.
- A young man coughed up blood as he felt hands around his neck choking him and an uncontrollable desire to rip off the cross from around his neck.

I could cite countless more illustrations—some attributable to the direct influence of sinister and destructive forces; and others explainable by natural phenomena, coincidence, fakery, psychosomatic manifestations, neurological, or chemical factors. Thus, it is crucial to have a balanced perspective by taking into consideration the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Biblical discernment is vital in determining whether one is dealing with actual hostile spiritual powers or merely physical or psychosomatic behavior.

EXTREMES ARE DANGEROUS

One extreme position is attributing all problems and phenomena to demons. The resulting confusion and fear can be disastrous. The other extreme is disbelieving in the existence of Satan and demons, making it virtually impossible to recognize their activities. Allowing undetected demonic activity negates the possibility of effectively dealing with it.

Equally ineffective is how many are using unbiblical beliefs and techniques and passing them off as powerful principles on spiritual warfare. Many have popularized techniques and beliefs that do not even resemble scriptural truth concerning spiritual warfare nor the example of Jesus, His disciples, and the apostle Paul.

The real spiritual battles are being lost while powerless believers are diverted into sensationalism, showy displays of force, and erroneous unbiblical strategies. These may appear impressive, but they are totally ineffective in truly defeating hostile spiritual forces, tearing down the strongholds of the enemy, and advancing the kingdom of God.

Boldly and accurately proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the best way to identify and deal with genuine demonic activity. Satan is threatened by the powerful and accurate proclamation of God's Word. He, therefore, is compelled to oppose and undermine it. This reveals his associates—those who fight against the work of the Gospel. Continued proclamation of God's Word through the anointing of God's Spirit is a powerful and effective tool in exposing and extinguishing demonic strongholds.

ALONG FOR A WILD RIDE

The exciting ride in southern California with my son-in-law of the California Highway Patrol taught me the biblical importance of ministering with companions as Paul did and also bearing one another's burdens. The day was filled with a diversity of circumstances such as car crashes, a

hit-and-run collision, traffic violations, a vehicle impound, high-speed driving, weaving in and out of traffic up to 115 mph in pursuit of a speeder, and responding to calls from dispatch.

I gained a greater respect for his job considering the potential dangers:

- traffic whizzing by as he was stopped along the road watching for violators
- high-speed driving—a tire blowout would be fatal
- occupants of vehicles that he pulled over could be armed and dangerous

One interesting occurrence happened as Clayton received a call that an officer needed back-up. Driving on the freeway at high speeds, we arrived to see a large, bizarre looking person who had been unwilling to cooperate with a much smaller officer.

This person was about six feet tall, over 200 pounds, and resembled a cat. “Cat” had tattoos completely covering his face and arms. The tattoos on his arms resembled scales and those on his face created a cat-like appearance. He had contact lenses to make his eyes appear like cat eyes and had long, claw-like, multi-colored fingernails. What started out as an attempt to stop him for speeding almost resulted in a tragedy. Instead of pulling over, he continued to drive three miles and then pulled in the driveway of a friend’s house. The other officer was visibly shaken by his appearance and intimidating behavior. He was not sure whom or what he was dealing with. “Cat” started walking toward the other officer before we arrived. Twice the other officer commanded him to stop and get back in his car, but he continued walking toward him. When the officer started to unstrap his gun holster, “Cat” finally backed off. Once Clayton arrived as back-up, the potential crisis was averted.

This encounter reminded me that as biblical Christians we are to share one another’s burdens. The support from other believers when one is facing personal difficulties, spiritual warfare, or ministering, is greatly needed and encouraging. It is no wonder Jesus sent His twelve disciples and the seventy out in pairs (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1).

Pattern of Spiritual Warfare in Scripture

Acts 16:12-40 reveals a pattern of spiritual warfare that is repeated throughout Scripture. First, we see the apostle Paul and his companions effectively proclaiming the Gospel near Philippi. Then Satan tries to oppose and defeat God's messengers. He uses a demon possessed slave girl in an attempt to neutralize Paul's powerful message, but victory seems apparent for the Lord as Paul casts the demon out. Yet Satan is relentless in his attempts to nullify the triumph of God's servants. The slave girl's owners drag Paul and Silas to the marketplace to face the authorities. After Paul and Silas are severely beaten, they are thrown into prison.

When it seems hopeless, God intervenes. At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God when suddenly there was a great earthquake. The chains fell off Paul and Silas and the prison doors opened. Instead of the jailer killing himself as he initially intended when he thought the prisoners escaped, he and his entire household accepted Christ. The next day the magistrates apologized to Paul and Silas and escorted them from jail. The end result proved to be ultimate victory.

Similar scenarios of spiritual warfare are found throughout Scripture. Satan attempts to undermine the victory the believer in Christ is gaining by raising up adverse circumstances or opposition to give an initial appearance of defeat. We must not lose heart or allow the enemy's smoke screens to hinder us from pressing on to final victory. The end result will always "work together for good" and be ultimate victory for those who trust the Lord and walk in obedience to His Word and Spirit.

Then we can say, like Joseph—

...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result... (Genesis 50:20).

In spiritual warfare, we must be prepared for the whole war, not just a few skirmishes. We need to stand firm and persevere until God brings the final triumph.

STAND IN FAITH AND ENDURE

Ephesians 6:10-13—

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will 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, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

It would be great if every spiritual battle we have could be over immediately. Although it may happen that way occasionally, Scripture reveals this is not always the case. In most situations, we must stand in faith and endure. We need the same determination to withstand intense spiritual warfare as we would if we were fighting an assailant who was trying to molest, rape, and kill our children or grandchildren. In such a situation, I am sure we would stand and fight. If they knocked us to the ground we would get back up. We would endure until every ounce of strength was gone. In spiritual warfare, we must have the same determination and endurance, because, as Jesus revealed, our spiritual enemy comes to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10).

In the face of attacks—whether they be inner temptation or relentless fiery darts—the believer must resist every aggression of the enemy and surrender no territory. Our defensive strategy is to maintain our ground by resisting the temptations of the evil one and by living worthy of our calling as children of God. Our offensive strategy in the battle against spiritual darkness is an unwavering mission to take ground from the enemy through advancement of the light of the Gospel—in spite of relentless opposition and assaults.

THERE IS A TIME

There is a time to take on the prophets of Baal as Elijah did. There is also a time to walk away from a spiritual confrontation to seek the face of the Lord until He reveals His word as Jeremiah did when he had an encounter with the false prophet Hananiah. And there is a time to trust the Lord to fight our battles, as He did when He delivered Moses from the approaching hordes of Pharaoh, and as Paul did when Alexander the coppersmith opposed his message.

There are times when we must take authority in the name and power of Christ and expect an immediate victory. And there are times when we must stand strong and endure in unwavering faith until God brings the victory in His time and way. What we need is wisdom and discernment to know the difference.

God raised up adversaries against Solomon when he sinned against the Lord and the enemy raises up adversaries against us when we live for the Lord and effectively proclaim the Gospel. So

how do you know who is raising up your adversaries? You will know. If you are in His Word and on your knees, you will have the necessary discernment.

RAGING AROUND US

My wife and I and a few staff took a group of teens canoeing. The trip proved to be a most exciting event and a unique opportunity to share about the Lord. It started raining right after we left and continued the whole time during the three-hour drive. The rain stopped while we set up our tent in the wind, but resumed shortly thereafter. The wind later blew down our tent and it poured and thundered all night. We spent part of the night drying in a laundromat. By morning, when it was time to go canoeing, the rain was over.

The muddy river was flowing wilder and higher than normal for a summer's day in August. The canoe livery decided immediately after renting out our canoes, that the water level and fast current prevented them from renting out any more canoes that day, so ours was the last group to head for the water.

As the exciting trip progressed, our group of canoers had done well in navigating the swiftly moving water. All of a sudden one girl's canoe capsized. Not being a swimmer, she thrashed around screaming for help. In her mind, she was about to drown!

I immediately dove in to save the panic-stricken girl. A couple teens dove in to assist me. In my endeavor to save her, my feet touched the bottom. The fast moving water at that spot was only about three feet deep. I said, "Kathy, stand up!" She quickly obeyed and was amazed and happy to discover she was not in over her head. In fact, she could easily stand on the sandy river bottom, bracing herself against the current.

Isn't that the way it is in many of life's circumstances? In facing adversity, we feel the spiritual warfare raging around us, threatening our peace and stability, dooming us to defeat and despair. We must stand firm in Christ, confident that He has our lives and all the various circumstances under control. In His time and way He will bring ultimate victory. When we cry out to Him with all our heart and when we obey His Word, He will intervene and deliver us.

The Armor of God

The apostle Paul took his place in the front lines of spiritual warfare. Drawing from real life experience, he is able to emphatically express the following in Ephesians 6:13-19—

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel (NIV).

Just as the Roman soldier going into battle needed to be outfitted with adequate equipment, likewise the Christian. Scripture lists the six pieces of armor that we need to understand and use in spiritual combat. While having devotions, my daughter Tabitha felt the Lord impress the following insights on her heart concerning the armor of God—which are relevant for all believers:

1. Belt of Truth—We need to know the real truth (the Word of God) and speak the truth to others. Just like a belt holds pants up and everything in place, our belt of truth is what keeps the armor of God in place. Without the knowledge of the real Truth found only in the Bible, we have nothing to hold the foundation of our lives together.

2. Breastplate of Righteousness—There is only One who is perfect and righteous, Jesus Christ. With our breastplate, provided by the righteousness of Christ, we should also emulate the character and actions of Jesus Christ. The breastplate covers the heart of the person wearing it. The heart is where we tend to keep our most treasured feelings and memories. Since our breastplate of righteousness is closest to our heart, Jesus should be the most important item that occupies that territory. If He is, then we will radiate Him.

3. Gospel of Peace—Our feet should be fitted with the gospel of peace. Every step we take and everywhere we go, we should be bringing forth and showing the peace of Christ. This peace should be evident in how we live our lives. Without the gospel of peace, the rest of our armor becomes weakened and useless. When trials, hardships, and temptations come, instead of peace, some exhibit impatience, grumbling, and bad attitudes which start to put chinks in their armor.

Replacing the peace of God with complaining starts a domino effect of grumbling, focusing on ourselves and problems, and taking our focus off Jesus and reaching others. How can we show others the gospel of peace, when our own emotions and actions do not show our complete faith

and trust in God? The whole armor of God must work as a unit, and we must show the world that God's peace in our hearts is stronger than anything we will ever face, even in impossible situations.

Romans 10:15—

...How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!

4. Shield of Faith—When trials come and Satan throws lies and troubles our way, the strength of our faith will be our protection to get us through those times. We need to have unwavering faith like Abraham (Romans 4:18-21), and know that God is who He says He is and will do what He promised to do. We must have faith in the Lord, His promises, and His Word.

5. Helmet of Salvation—Whether someone is riding a motorcycle or just a bicycle, their head is the most important part to protect. That is why many wear helmets. Someone who is being attacked by another person often curls up into a ball and puts his hands over his head to protect himself. Our salvation through Jesus is our helmet protecting us. It is our lifeline to heaven by God's grace. Wear it proudly. Our minds, sheltered by the helmet of salvation, need to be renewed by God's Word so we will not be conformed to the world but to the image of Jesus Christ.

6. Sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God)—All the other parts of the armor are primarily used for defensive purposes, but this particular piece of armor is given by God as an offensive weapon. That means our main offensive weapon is the Word of God. We need to quit resorting to unChristlike conduct such as yelling, out-of-control behavior, gossip, and so on as our means of attack or retaliation. Instead, we are to use biblical truths and principles to fight our battles and deal with problems, whether they are with ourselves or others. We must know Scripture in context and rightly divide His truth because God's Word is the only line of offense that will never fail and will enable us always to win our battles.

PRAYER COVER

The effectiveness of the armor of God is realized through a life saturated with prayer. Prayer is essential to achieving ultimate victory in spiritual warfare.

Prayer is the surrender of one's life and will to the Lord. Prayer is crying out to the Creator for His help, protection, and empowerment. Prayer is desiring His name to be glorified and His purpose to be accomplished. Prayer is releasing our faith in the One who has supreme power and authority. Prayer is a catalyst in deploying heaven's resources to assist God's saints.

According to Lieutenant Colonel Doug Mastriano, U. S. Army, who saw God do some miraculous things in Desert Storm—

Prayer is critically important to the Christian. Prayer is a cover of spiritual protection that offers a clear advantage. This “prayer cover” can be equated to the role that air cover plays in modern warfare. I saw firsthand in Operation Desert Storm how important it was to have air cover going ahead of us into battle. It occurred this way: before we fought the Iraqi divisions, our air cover went ahead of us to soften the enemy defenses, dwindle their combat power and to reduce their fighting spirit. In effect, our air cover prepared the battlefield to give us an advantage before we even got into the fight. Once we were engaged in a ground battle with the enemy, this air cover did not vanish. We always had at least two F-16 jet aircraft circling above, ready to help us overcome any fierce resistance that the Iraqi Republican Guards offered. This air cover was just a call away. When the Iraqis attempted to maneuver into an advantageous position, all we had to do was to call for the air cover to blunt the adversary’s plans.

Prayer cover operates in the same manner. When we pray, we call upon God to go ahead of us to prepare the battlefield to our advantage even before we are in the fight. As our prayers go forth, God orchestrates “strikes” against the enemy’s plans to weaken his combat power. Then, when the battle rages around us, this prayer cover serves to strike against the adversary’s schemes, while giving us the strength to take the war deeper into enemy territory to ultimate victory. Like air cover in modern combat, prayer cover makes the difference in spiritual warfare.

When the day of evil comes and we are facing the fiercest of battles, we must put on the full armor of God and pray earnestly. When the smoke is cleared away, may it reveal that we stood firm in the Lord and surrendered no ground to the enemy, but gained territory for the Lord.

Spiritual Warfare Likened to Physical Combat

The biblical principles of spiritual warfare are similar to those of physical combat. One who is preparing to spar an opponent seeks to discover his opponent's fighting strategies and techniques. Learning an opponent's strengths and weaknesses enables the fighter to determine his own defense strategy and method of attack to where his opponent is most vulnerable. The fighter then focuses on training and developing his own skills.

In order to become proficient in spiritual warfare we must spend sufficient time learning about Satan's strategies—"We are not ignorant of his [Satan's] schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). However, our main focus and priority should be developing our own spiritual muscles by studying God's Word and spending time in prayer. We must minor in knowing the details about the hostile spiritual forces and major in knowing the Lord and His Word.

IT IS WRITTEN

When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He did not use such responses as, "I am the Son of God," or "I am filled with the Holy Spirit," or "Look at all the miracles I perform." He said, "It is written...." Jesus used God's Word as His "sword of the Spirit" to thwart all the temptations of the enemy.

When Satan twisted God's Word and took it out of context, Jesus responded with scriptural truth. In answer to Satan's statement, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread," Jesus replied, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:3,4).

When Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matthew 4:5-7).

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

responded, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (Matthew 4:8-10). Jesus accurately used God’s Word to defeat His enemy.

A woman who came out of the occult wanted to grow closer to the Lord. One of several instructions I told her was to begin reading the Word and living by the truths and principles in it. She told me she was afraid to read it, because when she had attempted to leave the occult a few years earlier, the spirits harassed and tormented her every time she opened a Bible. She became so afraid that she gave up reading it.

I said to her, “The hostile spiritual forces want to divert you from studying Scripture because they know that it is the only offensive weapon you have, and that it ‘is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword’” (Hebrews 4:12). When God’s Word is accurately used by a believer submitted to His Spirit, it can cause great destruction to the kingdom of darkness.

I shared the following illustration with her: “When I was 10 years old, I was terrorized by 13-year-old guys who always wanted to beat me up. When I got older, however, 13-year-olds did not terrify me anymore. Likewise, when you were a slave to Satan’s kingdom, he terrorized you. But now that you are a child of God and walking with the King of kings and Lord of lords, you have power over the enemy. You need no longer be intimidated by the spiritual powers of darkness, much less run away in fear and defeat. Instead, strive to become an expert on God’s Word and walk in the courage and power of His Spirit.”

DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL MUSCLES

Suppose someone is breaking into your house to rob, rape or kill your family. It would be too late to run to the gym to lift some weights or take a self-defense course. You had to do that before. So, too, you will be in some heavy spiritual warfare in the days ahead. Instead of waiting until you are in the midst of the battle and wishing you had already developed some spiritual muscles and discernment, begin today through consistent study of God’s Word and a disciplined prayer life.

I used to think I was too busy to spend time in extensive Bible study and prayer. I always wanted to be on the front lines in the heat of the battle where all the action was. I soon learned that to be proficient and victorious in spiritual warfare, I had to study God’s Word diligently and spend time in prayer and fasting.

In the early days of my ministry I often got by with only a brief Bible study and a few minutes of prayer, and still saw victory. But as the warfare became more intense, I spent more and more time in Scripture and prayer—frequently fasting.

HIGH ALERT

Satan and his cohorts are like terrorists. They strike when you least expect it and where you are most vulnerable. Once the attack is over, they regroup to plan and prepare for another unexpected assault. Therefore, it is imperative that you remain alert and keep on the full armor of God, lest you fall into the snares of the evil one and are defeated by his diabolical devices.

Now is the time to become adept and skillful with the Word of God by “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). This is an age when having discernment, knowing Scripture in context, and having a powerful prayer life is crucial.

Athletes preparing to enter important competition are in strict training. Soldiers preparing for an imminent war are on high alert and in rigorous preparation. How much more should committed believers in Christ be in serious spiritual training and on high alert when we could be in the midst of tremendous spiritual warfare at any moment? We must lay “aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

When you have the “mind of Christ” as a result of continually renewing your mind with His Word and are being led by His Spirit, you will be equipped to deal with any situation that arises. Regardless of the circumstances, obstacles, or opposition, you will have the wisdom of what to do or say, and the Lord will strengthen you to walk in ultimate victory. My desire is to have such a knowledge of His Word and such a sensitivity to His Spirit that in any situation He can bring to my remembrance a Scripture or biblical principle to apply.

I laid down my intensive and rigorous physical training to focus on becoming proficient in spiritual warfare and accurately handling the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. I have a stronger desire and motivation today to walk in the power of His Spirit and skillfully use His Word in tearing down spiritual strongholds of the enemy and advancing God’s kingdom than I used to have for training to be an effective fighter with my hands and feet to defeat physical opponents.

ENTER A SPARRING MATCH

Before I became a Christian, I had a reputation in the karate dojo for being one of the hardest and fastest punchers. While sparring opponents would do fancy jumping and spinning techniques, I would block and strike. One unfortunate sparring opponent ended up with a caved-in rib cage. It is no longer my desire to cave in ribs, but I do seek to cave in and break through—by the power of God’s Word and Spirit—strongholds of the enemy.

When I was involved in sparring matches, I was a nice guy before and after. But in that arena I had great intensity and I knew only one thing: I wanted to defeat my opponent. So, too, when I am in the arena of spiritual warfare, I realize the tremendous responsibility to overcome by the power of His Spirit and accurately proclaim His truth.

Athletes in the Olympics are in intense competition and will not let anything distract them. Likewise, believers who are in intense spiritual warfare must not let anything infiltrate their lives or distract them, but must keep their focus on the Lord and His Word.

Delegated Authority

As a youth I had a fascination with the occult:

- Tales by a campfire and stories by my brothers of spirits of dead relatives upstairs frightened but intrigued me
- Twenty-one warts on my hands vanished shortly after a neighbor lady “bought” them
- I loved to watch occult movies and television shows and read books and magazines on witchcraft and spiritualism
- I attempted to cast spells, use mind powers, and hypnotize people
- I used Ouija boards and participated in or held seances—sometimes in the church I attended—in an effort to contact spirits of the dead
- I also went to fortune-tellers and haunted houses where genuine phenomena had occurred
- Wearing a black cape I played the devil in a school performance as female classmates danced in a circle worshipping me.

TERRIFIED OF THE DARK

The big old house I lived in had been in the family almost 100 years for five generations. They used to have funerals there and put the caskets in the living room for several days.

As a child I was terrified of the dark from all the stories I heard about ghosts and spirits floating around the house and the horror movies I watched. My oldest brother loved to traumatize me by locking me in dark rooms and closets in the upstairs of our big old house. I was scared to go upstairs at night by myself, thinking all those ghosts and spirits in the house would get me. I frequently had nightmares.

There were times I would have to be upstairs in the back bedroom all alone at night. If I thought I saw or heard something or had a nightmare, I would dash down the hall. To save time and not get grabbed by someone I thought might be hiding around the corner or in the front bedroom, I would jump over the banister and land halfway down the steps. My heart would be beating tremendously fast.

Even through lifting weights and karate as a teen, I was unable to overcome my childhood fear of the dark. I camouflaged and suppressed it, but it was still there. Only after I gave my life to Jesus Christ at the age of eighteen was I completely set free.

FACING MY FEAR

As a new Christian I knew I had to face my fear of the dark and spirit beings. One evening about 10 p.m. I went to my parent's house when no one was there. I decided to go through every room.

Using only a flashlight, I started in the cool damp basement where I had always been told dead bodies were buried behind the back wall. I brushed away the cobwebs as I screwed the light bulb into the socket for additional light. I walked over to an old wooden door where I thought the bodies were buried behind the stone wall and slowly opened it. The doorway was sealed with stones.

After going through the rest of the basement, I went up to the first floor and went into each room. I first entered the living room, then the dining room, then my parents' bedroom and large closet that was always a little frightening, then into the kitchen, bathroom, and entry room which had a door bolted shut that led to the basement and another that led to the back stairway. Then I went up the front stairs to the second floor rooms where I had most of my nightmares as a youngster. I walked through each room turning on the lights as I entered. I encouraged myself with such scriptural promises as, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) and "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Finally, I went up the creaky, narrow steps to the dark attic which often contained several bats and dead birds. Whenever I had to go into the attic as a youth, my strategy was to stay as close as possible to the attic steps so I could quickly get out if needed. Not this night though. So as not to get a protruding nail in the head I bent over to go through the low doorway to get to the section farthest away.

Going through the whole house and completing this arduous task was the beginning of being set free from the fears of my childhood. It did not happen overnight though. As I walked with the Lord, learned the promises in His Word, and grew in my faith, I was able to conquer my fear. Trusting in Him and the power of His Spirit are what set me free.

The Lord has transformed my life and given me courage and strength to stand alone on numerous occasions and to combat the very forces of darkness which I was so afraid of before coming to know Christ.

Psalm 34:4,7—

I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.

Matthew 10:28—

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

2 Corinthians 2:14—

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ....

2 Timothy 1:7—

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (KJV).

THE UNSEEN REALM

Second Kings chapter 6 gives great insight into the unseen heavenly realm. The king of Aram had sent a strong force to surround the city of Dothan where the prophet Elisha was staying. Verses 15-17 share the fascinating account—

Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Jesus knew the heavenly realm far better than Elisha. No wonder Jesus so emphatically told Peter to put his sword away during His arrest at the Garden of Gethsemane. He stated—

Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53).

NAME OF JESUS NOT MAGIC

I used to watch those old Dracula movies as a child. When someone held up a cross, the vampire cowered in fear. In real life it is not like that at all. We cannot use a cross, a Bible, or any other religious object as a magic weapon. Objects in themselves have no power. It is what they represent that has the power. Many people use Jesus’ name as though it were a magical word. But Jesus’ name is powerless—unless the one using it is submitted to His Lordship and walking in obedience to His Word and Spirit.

Scripture tells about the seven sons of Sceva who attempted exorcisms using the name of Jesus. Acts 19:13-16 gives the following account—

But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

In contrast, the Apostle Paul had an encounter with a demon-possessed slave girl near the city of Philippi. Acts 16:17,18 tells about this encounter—

Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out at that very moment.

A word of command was all Paul needed because he had delegated authority from the Lord.

WE ARE NO MATCH

The hostile spiritual forces and powers of darkness are not afraid of me. They could easily defeat me if I stood up to them alone. However, when I am walking in obedience to God’s Word and empowered by His Spirit, I represent Jesus Christ—who is omnipotent. That is why I stand in such boldness and confidence.

When I became a Christian, a weightlifting friend of mine (who could bench press over 400 pounds) said to me, “I want to go to hell so I can beat up the devil.” What foolishness and delusion to think—no matter how strong and skilled—that we can defeat Satan and his cohorts with physical power.

2 Corinthians 10:3,4 states—

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

Zechariah 4:6 declares—

“...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts.

A high-ranking martial artist told me that he felt we were heading for a battle between good and evil, and wanted to develop his abilities and train his students to help God triumph over Satan. I assured him that Christ will not need any help.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 says—

Then that lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.

On our own we are no match for the devil. Jude 9 reveals that not even Michael the Archangel, when he disputed with Satan over the body of Moses, would accuse him, but rather he said, “The Lord rebuke you.” Apparently, Satan has retained much of the power and authority that he had before his fall. Nevertheless, he is a defeated enemy because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE ENEMY WILL FLEE

When my children were young, my son loved to go into the room of his sister who was three years older, to tease and torment her—as little brothers love to do. One night, when she could tolerate it no more, I heard my daughter cry out, “Daddy! Daddy! Help me! BJ is bothering me!” As soon as BJ knew I was coming, he ran out of her room. That night as I kissed her good night and prayed with her, Tabitha said to me, “It’s really neat. All I have to do is call your name and BJ runs away.” I responded, “You know what is even better? When the enemy begins to torment us and cause us fear, all we have to do is call for Jesus.”

I continued, “BJ runs when you call for me, because he knows I will protect you from him. So, too, since you are God’s child, when you cry out to the Lord, the enemy will flee. The Lord will come to your aid and either rescue you or give you the strength to stand.”

James 4:7,8 says—

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you....

SATAN IS UNDER THE LORD’S CONTROL

As a brand-new Christian I worked at a quick lube service center. A fellow employee frequently agitated me. One day I was rustproofing the inside trunk of a car when he made a smart remark. I picked him up and carried him over to the trunk, dropped him in, and closed the lid.

I did not realize he was claustrophobic, but he was. He screamed and kicked and beat on the trunk lid. After a few minutes I let him out. He was like a swarm of hornets after me—ranting and raving, swinging and kicking wildly. I backpedaled quickly, blocking each step of the way as I tried to verbally calm him down. He was relentless, so I put my hand on his head to hold him at bay, as he flailed away, beating the air—unable to touch me.

That is how it is with Satan. He wants to destroy us, but he is under the Lord's control and can do no more than God allows. Satan rants and raves and seeks to destroy and intimidate us. But if we are walking with the Lord, He puts His hand on Satan's head, in a sense, thus setting the limits of how far he can go.

I have respect for the powers of darkness, but I do not fear them in a paranoia, controlling type of fear. I have a greater fear and a greater respect and reverence for the God of the Bible who is far superior to Satan and the forces of evil.

Satan is not as some people seem to think—God's evil opposite, equal in power. In Job 2:1 we see he must present himself before and give an account to God like all the other angels. In biblical accounts of struggles with the devil, they are not contests between God and Satan, but rather Satan and his cohorts contending with angels and men (Revelation 12:7-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:18). As soon as God enters the conflict, Satan is defeated (Jude 9; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:19–20:3). In fact, when it is God's timing for Satan to be thrown into the abyss for a thousand years, it will take only one angel to bind him and throw him in (Revelation 20:1-3).

GET A CORRECT VIEW OF JESUS

Satan would like us to envision Jesus as a mere human being walking around the shore of the Sea of Galilee preaching love and peace, while envisioning Satan himself as a powerful, supernatural being who performs mighty signs and wonders. Then we would wrongly conclude, "Maybe Satan is more powerful. Perhaps he will eventually defeat God."

But let us get a correct view of the biblical Jesus. He is the sovereign Lord and King of the universe. He is the exalted One in John's vision on the Isle of Patmos—

His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His

mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1:14-16).

This is the resurrected and glorified Christ whom I serve. He is the One who has dominion over all the angelic host and forces of darkness. He has unlimited power and majesty. When I am submitted to His lordship, obedient to His Word, and yielded to His Spirit, then I represent Him and walk in His delegated authority and power.

Jesus stated—

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).

He has delegated some of this authority to believers in Him. Jesus told the seventy—

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you (Luke 10:19).

The apostle Paul stated—

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know...what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe (Ephesians 1:18,19).

Christ's Power Versus Satan's

Satan and his demonic cohorts use deception and sensationalism to camouflage their inferior and often meaningless displays of power. Most of it is pure exhibitionism in phenomena such as levitation, telekinesis, telepathy, apparitions, and the like. Even supposed healings are of no real benefit—the person usually develops an even worse problem in some other area of his or her life or the healing does not last. In contrast, Christ gives genuine healing instead of counterfeit; freedom instead of bondage; courage instead of fear; and true joy and peace instead of superficial happiness and pleasure.

BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

Satan is in rebellion against the Lord and wants to enslave and destroy humans because we are a creation of God. First Thessalonians 5:23 says—

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Word tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Satan wants to destroy our temple and mock God through tempting us to live a self-gratifying and self-destructive lifestyle.

God's Word tells us the mind is a spiritual battleground and that we need to renew it and keep it on guard. Satan, on the other hand, wants to corrupt our mind with filth and put it in a passive, neutral, non-resistant mental state.

God's Word tells us our spirit is made in His image and that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. Satan seeks to make us spiritual prostitutes by making someone or something else god in our lives and conforming us to his image of pride and rebellion against our Creator.

In that way Satan can say, "Look at Your creation and what they are doing to themselves. They are prostituting and destroying their bodies, minds, and spirits." Thereby Satan, though far inferior to God in power and who cannot contend with Him, in some twisted and perverted way gets a sense of pleasure.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DANIEL

Daniel lived in a pagan, idolatrous, and occultic society, yet he stayed true to the God of the Bible. At times, the Babylonian sorcerers thought he was operating the same powers they were, but Daniel walked in obedience and commitment to the God of the Bible.

Daniel made a decision not to defile himself with the king's choice food or wine (Daniel 1:8). He honored the Lord with his physical body. He also did not fill his mind with or rely on sorcery and occultism (Daniel 2). Finally, he made a commitment to pray three times a day—even though it could cost him his life (Daniel 6). He honored the Lord spiritually.

God greatly blessed Daniel because he honored and obeyed Him with every aspect of his life—physically, mentally, and spiritually. He was healthier than those who ate the king's choice food. When the magicians, conjurers, and sorcerers could not tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream or the interpretation, Daniel could. God protected Daniel from certain death in the lions' den and greatly exalted him.

CHRIST'S SUPERIOR POWER

I am sure everyone has encountered or been victimized by a bully sometime in their lives. Bullies enjoy pushing people around, showing off, and bragging about how tough they are. In reality they are seeking attention to conceal their insecurity and inferiority complex. I discovered at a young age not to be afraid of the big mouths and show-offs—what they could do is obvious. However, I learned to respect the tough, quiet, confident guys. They knew what they could do and did not have to prove it or boast about it. When necessary or when they were pushed too far, I saw many of them explode with tremendous power.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Satan is a bully and a show-off. He likes to demonstrate his power to impress and intimidate people. He knows that he is in every way inferior to Christ. Deluded by pride, he may actually believe that he will somehow win in his rebellion against God, but Scripture reveals that his time is short and discloses what his final destiny will be.

In addition to a much brighter eternal future, we also have far superior power through Jesus Christ. We do not have to show off or prove it. When we do encounter the forces of darkness, we can experience the reality of the exceedingly greater power of Christ.

A man I knew who performed several phenomenal physical feats had a countenance that intimidated people. He walked into my ministry center one day with another man. He sat in my office telling me about some of his displays of power, thinking he was impressing and intimidating me. In my mind I asked the Lord for wisdom and boldness.

After he had talked for about ten minutes concerning the phenomenal feats he could do, I interrupted and said, "Let me tell you something. This building you are sitting in is a miracle.

God moved in an incredible way in giving us this land and providing this ministry center. During the 10 years we sponsored special outside outreaches on this property, we were never rained out. This God I serve has intervened and protected me on numerous occasions when I should have been killed. He has always met our needs and has been faithful to fulfill everything He has led us to do.”

I described other miraculous interventions the resurrected Christ has done in my life and ministry. This man became very subdued. It reminded me of the way Belshazzar’s face grew pale and his knees began knocking when God’s hand appeared and began to write on the wall (Daniel 5:5,6). The change in this person’s face and countenance was very visible.

The Spirit of God within us is greater than any human or hostile spiritual power. We need not cower in fear before any man or demonic being.

Deuteronomy 10:14,17—

Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God....

INFERIOR TO GOD’S POWER

Throughout Scripture we discover that Satan and his cohorts do have power, but it is far inferior to the power of God. Pharaoh’s magicians were able to mimic some of the miracles God performed through Moses. They could turn water into blood (Exodus 7:14-25) and cause frogs to multiply (Exodus 8:1-7). They were also able to turn their staffs into serpents, but Aaron’s staff/serpent swallowed up theirs (Exodus 7:10-13).

Following God’s plague of lice in Egypt (Exodus 8:16,17), Scripture makes known—

The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not.... Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (Exodus 8:18,19).

The magicians had power from Satan, but it was inferior to that which God manifested through Moses and Aaron.

Moses records the Lord proclaiming in Deuteronomy 32:39—

See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me...and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

Isaiah records God’s sarcasm concerning the futility of sorcery and the impending fall of Babylon—

You felt secure in your wickedness and said, “No one sees me,” your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; for you have said in your heart, “I am, and there is no one besides me.” But evil will come on you which you will not know how to charm away; and disaster will fall on you for which you cannot atone; and destruction about which you do not know will come on you suddenly.

Stand fast now in your spells and in your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth...let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you. Behold, they have become like stubble, fire burns them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame... (Isaiah 47:10-14).

We see God’s superior power revealed in Daniel, who was able to make known King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and give the interpretation, when the magicians, conjurers, and sorcerers were not able to (Daniel 2:1-49). We see a similar account in Genesis 41:8-46 as Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh’s dream, but the magicians and wise men of Egypt could not.

Simon the magician amazed the people with his occult powers, but Simon was even more amazed by the power of Christ which was manifest through Philip as he preached the Gospel (Acts 8:9-24).

Elymas the magician, who was a sorcerer and a false prophet, opposed Paul and Barnabas as they proclaimed the Word of God and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, pronounced that Elymas would be blind for a time for not ceasing to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:6-12).

Scripture reveals that the Antichrist and False Prophet will be able to perform counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13,14), but will be destroyed by the appearance of Christ’s coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

The Bible leaves no doubt concerning the incredible magnitude and exceeding greatness of God’s power. God’s mighty power “worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:20,21 NKJV).

Conversion of a Voodoo Witch Doctor

In the midst of coup attempts, embargoes, political upheaval, excessive poverty, and oppression from voodoo, God's Spirit still moved in a powerful way. The following are excerpts of an actual encounter with a voodoo witch doctor including details supplied by other eyewitnesses. These well-documented experiences occurred during five mission trips to Haiti.

He was known to be the meanest man in the community...a killing machine who murdered and tortured many people through voodoo. His name was Jacques, the voodoo priest (more popularly known as the witch doctor). I met him in Haiti during my first outreach there. He was living with a woman near the Mission Possible compound.

Except for what Leila, my interpreter who was serving as a missionary in Haiti told me, I knew little about Jacques when we first met. Leila told me that a few years earlier Jacques had been preparing to sacrifice a baby when she intervened and rescued the child from his arms.

Another account involved Idelette, a beautiful Haitian girl, who worked at the mission compound. Her mother was seriously involved in voodoo with her boyfriend Jacques, the witch doctor, and was quite upset that Idelette was working at a Christian mission where she would reveal Jacques' voodoo secrets. This also greatly angered Jacques.

One day, those at Mission Possible heard awful blood curdling screams and voodoo drums. Some of the missionaries looked over the mission compound wall and saw that Jacques had tied up Idelette, naked, to a chair and was beating her and using hot charcoal to burn the religious spirit out of her. He cut her head with a machete and tried to force her to drink a cup of animal blood and denounce Jesus. She would not denounce Him!

I asked why they did not intervene. I was told that it was unlawful to interfere with a voodoo ceremony and they were afraid the voodoo practitioners would come and machete everyone to death in the mission compound.

Again, I was hearing firsthand about the paralyzing power of darkness. Yet I knew through Scripture and years of personal experience that the power of God is greater. The awesome, transforming power of God is what this story is all about.

Jacques and I met for only an hour that day, but it was enough to plant the seeds of God's powerful truth in Jacques' mind. I asked probing questions about voodoo; he remained elusive. So I turned instead to sharing my testimony of how God changed my life.

I felt great compassion for him from the Lord. God's Spirit was leading me to share the love of Christ gently with him rather than to come on too strong. So I said it in love, but it was bold. I declared to him that the spirits which gave him power and information were not gods but demons. I warned him that when the spirits, which he thought he controlled, had no more use for him, they would discard him like garbage. "When they do," I said, "the only One who is powerful enough to help you is Jesus Christ. So call on Him!" Jacques said he was not ready to give his life to Christ, but he did want me to pray for him.

The seeds of truth were planted. During the following two years they were watered by Bettie, director of Mission Possible, who greeted Jacques with "Jesus loves you!" whenever they met. The Lord was working on Jacques' hardened heart to the point that when Bettie told him I was coming back to Haiti he got excited! Shortly after I arrived, Jacques came to the mission compound at night to see me.

I brought a team of seven people with me during this second outreach to Haiti. We spoke at several churches and schools, including remote mountain schools that few missionaries ever get to. We ministered hut to hut in several villages and delivered thousands of pounds of food to many mountain communities. This was also the appointed time for Jacques' conversion.

The day after we arrived I went to Jacques' hut with several team members. I stood face to face talking to him as Rosemond, the interpreter, stood to the side of us. Jacques towered over me by almost a foot. I shared with him from Revelation 20:11-15 that unless he gave his life to Jesus Christ and his name was written in the Book of Life he would be separated from God's presence for eternity.

After sharing for a little while longer, I told him I would come back the same time tomorrow and we would have a Bible study together. I did not want to push him too fast, but he called me back to pray. I believe he had cast many spells on me during the past two years, but when he saw they were ineffective and that I had courage and love from the Lord, he wanted to know the God I served. So during the prayer I mentioned the power of Christ being greater than the power of voodoo and renounced Jacques' past voodoo involvement—all of which he sincerely repeated after me.

By this time Jacques' hut was surrounded by people who were peering in—some of the men had hateful glares on their faces. Their eyes seemed enflamed with anger.

During this whole ordeal I was focused on Jacques and aware of little else. Things were unfolding so quickly and happening spontaneously as some team members were praying and others were playing with the children to keep them occupied. My wife later told me that she started to pray outside the hut when suddenly a strong evil presence almost knocked her over. She started to quote Scripture and a peace came over her. She prayed a hedge of protection around the hut and all of us.

Jacques led me into an inner room of his hut where all his voodoo items were kept. He lit a candle in this dark room and began to gather all the voodoo pictures, fetishes, leaves, and other items to burn. The Spirit of God was so powerful in that little room that I said to the others, "Get

on your knees.” Simultaneously myself, Jacques, Rosemond, and two team members who had just joined me fell to our knees as I prayed a prayer to dedicate Jacques’ hut to the Lord.

Jacques was gathering up the voodoo items and taking them outside to burn. By now almost 100 villagers were gathered outside the hut. Jacques went back in his hut and even brought out the stand his voodoo materials were on. Rosemond got some dried grass and found a neighbor with a lighter and burned them.

Jacques went back in the hut and dug up some bottles. An inverted cross in his yard was burned. Jacques even pulled out an aloe vera plant he used for herbal medicine and spells and cast it into the fire.

I have never felt God’s power so great. It was like a chapter out of the book of Acts. Through the interpreter I said to the people gathered in a large circle around the burning voodoo items near Jacques’ hut, “You may want to know what has happened this day. The God who created the heavens and the earth has revealed Himself to Jacques and Jacques has given Him his life.”

My daughter Tabitha and another female team member saw two men with machetes and one man with a lead pipe run over. Their nostrils flared and their eyes were inflamed with rage and hatred. I am sure Satan’s plan was for them to kill me, the interpreter, and Jacques, and thereby put an end to all of this, but God protected us. Besides, His presence was so real that I had no fear at all.

After finishing my message and sharing the truth and reality of Christ and their need to accept Him, I said, “All who want to have the courage Jacques had to accept Christ, raise your hand.” I raised mine and so did all of my team members, as well as most of the women, all of the children, and some of the men. But still many men stood there with hate in their eyes.

I knew Jacques might be greatly persecuted or even killed, so I told the people that I would hold a Bible study the next day at the same time. I went to the two meanest looking men and said that I hoped they would come. They said they would.

Bettie later told me that the whole village and community were talking about it. Later that night Jacques came to the mission compound on his own and joined in the singing. Everyone at the mission compound praised and thanked the Lord for the tangible miracle He brought through Jacques that day.

The next day we went to Jacques’ hut and had a Bible study. It went well. Pastor Boisrond of the Salvation Army who interpreted for me said he would help disciple Jacques when I returned to the U.S. After Bible study, I had our group split into three teams, each group with its own interpreter. We went into the nearby villages to minister and all had great experiences.

Jacques told us that God began dealing with his heart two years ago, after I initially talked to him. Then when I came back to Haiti, he made his final decision to give his life to Christ when he burned everything. Bettie said this was the greatest miracle they had seen that year.

We learned that several days earlier, Jacques had been given thirty-five dollars to perform a voodoo ceremony for someone. But when he converted, he said he would not do it and that he would pay back the thirty-five dollars. Jacques is a changed man.

A fax from Bettie to the Mission Possible headquarters in Florida titled, “Witch Doctor Saved In Haiti,” stated—

The air was thick and heavy as the bonfire burned brightly behind the compound. The gods of voodoo were being burned up. For miles around, people were talking and gathering toward the site of the fire. He’s been converted! After hearing this report of the dreaded witch doctor Jacques Innocent, some came to the place with great joy, others with machetes. What a miracle!

The last time Bill Rudge was here was two years ago. At that time he asked me to get him an interview with the witch doctor who sometimes tried to torment us. This man had been known to be vicious, even a killer. Bill asked him some questions, told him that he loved him and so did Jesus, and that he would pray for him. From that time on when I would see him, I would stop and greet him. Sometimes he would respond, other times not.

When Bill came back this week, along with a group, he asked again to see Jacques, so I arranged it. When they met again, Bill talked to him about the Lord. He accepted Jesus with tears of joy. Jacques remembered the man who took time for him. He said that God had been working on him since that time.

The bonfire was his statement to the community that he had made his choice. He burned cards, jugs of potions, beads, feathers, and pictures. The last thing to go was an aloe plant in his yard. He used it for the basis of his potions. When all the things were burned, the power of God was awesome. When our Haitian helpers heard the news, they danced in the kitchen singing, “Jacques is converted! Jacques is converted!”

Jacques stated the following while sharing his testimony in a nearby village:

If there are any of you who do not know me, it is because you have not been here long. This was my district as a witch doctor. You looked to me as your god, but I am here to tell you that I am not your god. Then he pointed his hand toward heaven and said: “My God and your God is up there.” He proceeded to share what happened to him and how his conversion has affected his life.

Right after his testimony at one of the villages, a man came up and said that he wanted what Jacques had. Not long thereafter, when the Gospel was shared with Jacques' mother, she responded by indicating that she wanted what Jacques had, as she had observed the change in her son.

One of the men who had a machete and wanted to kill us during Jacques' conversion became a believer in Christ after several years of watching the change in Jacques' life. I have no doubt that Jacques' conversion has touched many lives in Haiti and there will be many Haitians in heaven as a result.

Since his conversion, Jacques has endured much suffering for the name of Christ. He has gone through many difficulties, but continues to be faithful because the truth of God's Word has set him free and the love and power of Christ, which are greater than anything he had known before, sustain him.

During my fifth outreach to Haiti, more than ten years after Jacques' conversion, Bruce Lozier was one of the team members who went with me. It was a powerful trip in the midst of much turmoil and danger during which Jacques traveled with us to minister. Bruce writes:

During Jacques' testimony, he told of some dreams that he had. One was before he came to know the Lord and one he had after coming to know the Lord as Savior. The first dream was that a white missionary was going to come to share the good news of Jesus Christ with him. In the dream, he was told that if he did not accept Jesus as Lord he would soon die. One day this dream was fulfilled when the Bill Rudge ministry team returned to Haiti and Bill had the blessed opportunity to lead Jacques to Jesus Christ. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between these two men as well.

The second dream that Jacques shared was that Satan came to him and told him that he was going to make him a very wealthy man, but first he had to denounce Christ and serve Satan. As proof of his allegiance to Satan, he had to thrust his hand through a dark hole. Jacques refused and his response was that he was through with all of that and he said, "I serve Jesus now."

I had heard many stories about Jacques before coming to Haiti and I was elated to get to know him and hear him give his testimony. I was greatly encouraged to see how God turned this man's life around.

It seems like only yesterday that we met Jacques when he was steeped in voodoo and occult superstitions. Truly, God has changed his life. Many other amazing things have happened as a result of Jacques' conversion, but are too numerous to share in this book. God's grace and power continue to touch lives that have been bound in darkness with the light of His Gospel.

I have also had encounters with many other voodoo witch doctors on their turf. The power of Christ has always proven superior, and the love of Christ has always touched their hearts in some way.

Victory in Christ

Before going on a space mission, NASA crew members are trained in a spacecraft simulator. During flight training, the crew is watched on the monitor by two different NASA teams attempting to influence the outcome of the training mission. One team's intended purpose is to disrupt the mission by creating various scenarios which might occur on a space mission. They design every kind of problem and obstacle they can conceive to thwart the successful completion of the simulated mission. Another NASA team, also watching on a monitor, assists the crew in correcting the problem and fulfilling the mission.

Eventually, this crew, with the help of its support team, will become so proficient that no obstacle will deter the successful completion of their mission.

Likewise, hostile spiritual forces may use every diabolical and relentless attack to influence and defeat us. Nevertheless, victory is assured because on our side are the heavenly host and the Almighty Creator of all things. As we use the shield of faith, the armor of God, and are empowered by His Spirit, we can face and overcome all assaults by the enemy as we fulfill our mission in serving Christ and reaching this world for Him.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

We are not alone in our struggles in life, nor in our conflict with the hostile spiritual powers. God's unseen heavenly army does battle alongside His faithful followers. A few examples are found in the following Scriptures: Joshua 5:13-15; 2 Kings 6:15-17; Psalm 34:7; Daniel 9:20-23; Daniel 10:12-21; Acts 12:5-11; Acts 27:23 and Hebrews 1:14.

Nevertheless, our focus and trust are not in angelic beings, but on Jesus Christ. He is the One who enables us to achieve ultimate victory as the following Scriptures indicate.

Romans 8:35,37—

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or naked-ness, or peril, or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

1 John 4:4—

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.

1 John 5:4,5—

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Revelation 12:11—

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

THE DECISIVE BATTLE HAS BEEN WON

If you research various wars throughout history, you will discover that there was often a particular battle which was fought that was decisive—the war was really won or lost there. Although the war may have continued for some time, that decisive battle actually determined the final outcome. Our decisive battle was fought and won almost 2,000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, true believers in Him now have hope and assurance of ultimate victory because of His triumph. Although our spiritual warfare continues, the war is already won. We can stand as conquerors in His name, enduring and remaining faithful to Him—even in the face of death—until He returns to establish His eternal kingdom.

Obviously, the Lord could easily end the struggle immediately, but in His wisdom and sovereignty, He has entrusted the outcome of much spiritual warfare to us as believers in Christ. That is why we must become proficient in the arena of spiritual warfare. Satan may at times temporarily appear to have defeated us. However, when we stand in faith and obedience to God's Word and Spirit, we will always ultimately gain the victory.

PREPARE FOR WARFARE

While it is true that we are in the midst of the most intense spiritual warfare in history as Satan attempts to wear out the saints and deceive the world, through Christ we win!

Scripture reveals that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Everyone who has ever lived on this planet, all the angelic beings, every demonic spirit, even Satan himself, will one day bow before the glorified Christ and admit that He is Lord.

Philippians 2:9-11 declares—

...God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In closing, let me challenge you to make a commitment today to develop your spiritual muscles. Separate yourself from the lures of the world. Seek to become an expert on God's Word by diligently studying it. Develop discernment and sensitivity to His Spirit by spending time on your knees in prayer with fasting. Then stand in His courage, strength, and power—persevering in faith no matter what—until the Lord brings the ultimate victory.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bill Rudge has produced numerous books, pamphlets, and CDs on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of his informative newsletter, visit our web site or write to:

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