

Spiritual Warfare Tactics

By Dr. Jonathan Carl

In evaluating spiritual warfare methods in evangelism, one must evaluate tactics that concern the unbeliever who hears and the believer who shares the gospel message. This section will also consider discipleship and sanctification issues in spiritual warfare. There is only space for a cursory engagement with and critique of each method. The previous spiritual warfare approaches show much overlap between their methods. In chapter five any approaches and methods relevant to Anderson will be examined in greater depth based off of this initial foundation of understanding.

The Hearer as Unbeliever or Believer

The primary concern for all hearers is their spiritual condition. Their spiritual condition can be often confused or overlooked if a demon manifests itself or if the individual demonstrates oppression or possession behaviors. These events can cause questions concerning personal claims of Christian-allegiance.¹ Other complications arise in considering past occultist ties, unconfessed sin, or demonic allegiances that have not been renounced. Some theories advocate that past sins may allow Satan to have permission or special access to that individual. Discerning whether a hearer is a lost soul in need of evangelism or a saved soul in need of discipleship is

complicated by the ambiguity which surround the meaning of the word *Christian* in many contexts today. If one wishes to include within the category of believer so-called nominal Christians or those who may no longer consider themselves to be believers but are part of traditions which still regard them as Christian, owing to a previous profession of faith or baptism, then perhaps one can argue for the domination of such “Christians” by demons. However, such modern ways of defining the term *Christian* do not take seriously enough the lines of demarcation which the New Testament draws between believers and unbelievers.²

¹Moreau, *Deliver Us from Evil*, xxvi.

²Ibid., 54.

As seemingly difficult as it may be to determine the validity of one's faith claims, the essential element to be shared is the gospel news through the Biblical texts as the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17). The hearer must be encouraged and exhorted to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (2 Cor 13:5). Scriptural truth clarifies that there are two types of people: "children of the devil" and "children of God," and that one's true allegiance and state can be evidenced by their life (1 John 3:10).

Believers and unbelievers both need to hear gospel truths, but only true believers will respond in genuine repentance, belief, and life-changing faith that works itself out in visible, progressive change. Billy Graham claims that "our world is on fire, and man without God cannot control the flames. The demons of hell have been let loose."³ Many Christians have tried to devise methods to engage these demons. These methods must be tested and evaluated in light of Scripture in order to understand if they are God's methods and possible vehicles for His power. Only a believing hearer has hope in any spiritual warfare encounter.

Therapeutic Level Warfare

Spiritual healing, faith healing, or physical healing ministries are types of therapeutic level spiritual warfare. This approach is to alleviate physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual harm done by demons. This category of spiritual warfare does not engage in evangelistic ministry and avoids the topic of salvation.⁴ Their focus is on helping people to "have their lives in order" instead of recognizing that their real need lies in the fact that "they have not trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord. Their souls are

³Billy Graham, "Why the Berlin Congress?," in *The World Congress on Evangelism* (Berlin: Wheaton College, 1966).

⁴One will see some similarities in this approach to Anderson's lack of evangelistic appeal.

‘unoccupied’—that is, the Holy Spirit does not indwell them. Thus they are open to demonic invasion (Matt 12:43-45).”⁵

Therapeutic advocates argue, “with rare exceptions, the New Testament references to suffering relate to demonic attacks, persecution . . . or divine judgment, not to human illness.”⁶ Therapeutic-type warfare must avoid the delusion of trying to do reparative surgery on a dead soul. John states that believers must remain “faithful unto death” despite demonic suffering, being reminded of Christ’s gift of life (Rev 2:10) and not focused on temporary solutions.

When Paul asks God for deliverance three times from “a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor 12:7-10) sent to harass him and keep him humble, God responds that “my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Paul’s response is not in persisting in seeking therapeutic relief from the demonic, but to “for the sake of Christ” to be “content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities” (2 Cor 12:10) by remembering in self-weakness flows divine-strength. Without salvation, no amount of therapy will solve one’s spiritual needs. With salvation, there must be a point of release that trusts God’s provision or withholding of comfort and relief.

Occult Level Warfare

Occult warfare describes a variety of activities and people directly connected with active worshiping of Satan and his demons. Such a differentiation between Satan-worshippers and “regular” unbelievers is unhelpful and unbiblical. The spiritual condition of members of the occult is no different from the spiritual condition of kind, nominal Christians. Paul describes humanity as all having been “dead in the trespasses and sins . .

⁵MacArthur, *Standing Strong*, 28.

⁶C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1988), 255.

. following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:1-2). Despite the common effects of Adam and Eve’s original sin upon all mankind (Rom 5:12-19), some warfare proponents endorse a view of engaging different levels or types of demons.

Charles Kraft goes so far as to describe at least eight different types of evil spirits: family, occult, ordinary, territorial/institutional/religion, vice, household/geographical/cultural items, and ancestral.⁷ Kraft and others thus deduce that since there are different types of demons, there must be different methods of warfare for each type. Although demonic forces may manifest themselves differently in occult and non-occult persons, biblical spiritual warfare methods remain unchanged. God’s Word shows that there is only one suit of armor, the armor of God, that must be put on daily and saturated with constant prayer (Eph 6:10-20). All non-believers are in a condition of spiritual deadness, following Satan as his children in an active state of rebellion against God, but are never beyond the saving grace and power of Christ.

Ground Level Warfare

Ground level spiritual warfare is the category that most people think of when they hear the term spiritual warfare. Kraft defines this warfare as that which “takes place in human contexts, in contrast with warfare that takes place largely in the air.”⁸ Ground warfare draws the most attention through the attention of media and popular culture in the form of possession or demonization encounters.

Exorcism and deliverance. Demon possession of unbelievers is often the aspect of ground level warfare that is viewed as most spectacular. It is clear from Scripture that demon possession occurred in a variety of ways. Some people were

⁷Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 59-60.

⁸Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 200.

delivered of these demons on their own faith, others on the faith of others (Mark 9:23-24), and sometimes without any expressed desire to be rid of the demon.⁹ While some restrict such occurrences to the Bible, Millard Erickson points out “there is no reason to believe that demon possessions are restricted to the past.”¹⁰

Exorcists are widely criticized. Dramatic demonstrations and exaggerations often lead towards pride-filled ministries and enriched bank accounts. Experiences and anecdotes typically direct exorcism methodology instead of Scripture. Some exorcists seek “demons for information to use in expelling them” or ask for special revelation from God in the form of “words of knowledge.”¹¹ These exorcism methods are cause for concern for “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14) in order to lead people away from the all-sufficient source of knowledge in the Bible.

Specific exorcism methods are important to consider. Although there may be a “tremendous need for a deliverance ministry,” that does not validate all methods as biblical.¹² Scripture shows that both Jesus and his apostles “cast out demons without pronouncing an elaborate formula” and sometimes did it without even being physically present (Mark 7:24-30).¹³ MacArthur cautions that the epistles never prescribe or “instruct believers to cast out demons” and that whenever they did, “the demon-possessed people were unbelievers.”¹⁴ The dangers of attempting exorcism in one’s own methods and power are seen in failure (Mark 9:14-18) and in physical harm (Acts 19:11-20). Such a method-centered focus can also point people to the practitioner’s power and ability rather than to the power of God (1 Cor 2:1-5).

⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 473-74.

¹⁰Ibid., 474.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Douglas and Graham, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 894.

¹³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 474.

¹⁴MacArthur, *Standing Strong*, 25-26.

Those who exorcise must understand that “Satan, the great deceiver, may be encouraging interest in demon possession in hopes that Christians will become careless about other more subtle forms of influence by the powers of evil.”¹⁵ The ultimate concern of an evangelist towards a hearer is not the presence of demons but rather the absence of Christ. Salvation, not exorcism, is the goal, understanding that if one accepts Christ, they become “the temple of the living God” with which Satan has no portion (2 Cor 6:14-16).

Ancestor spirits and ghosts. The worship of ancestor spirits and interest in paranormal phenomenon are different but have a common fear and unhealthy desire to ascertain the future. Those who suffer from these fears seek to alleviate it in a variety of ways through rituals, sacrifices, idols, superstitious practices, and the consultation of a variety of practitioners (witch doctors, mediums, sorcerers, necromancers, etc.). Ancestor worship practitioners see ancestors as “important mediators between humans and spirits” who defend and provide wisdom to their relatives.¹⁶ Those who seek out ghosts often do so out of desires similar to occult practitioners: a “desire for knowledge,” “lust for power,” “need for comfort,” “protection,” or “spiritual satisfaction” to their unhealthy curiosities.¹⁷

Scripture wholly condemns the practice of consulting the dead (Deut 18:11), divination (Lev 19:26), sorcery (Deut 18:10), mediums (Lev 19:31), seeking ghosts (Ezek 13:20), witchcraft (Gal 5:20), astrology (Isa 47:13-14, Deut 4:19), spell casting (Deut 18:11), and interpreting omens (Deut 18:11). No spiritual being or encounter will ever satisfy a person’s desires. True, lasting satisfaction is only found through a saving

¹⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 474.

¹⁶Hiebert, *Case Studies in Missions*, 24. In one example demonstrating the widespread influence of ancestor worship, over 90 percent of the Chinese in Taiwan “do not want to become Christians because they must give up ancestor practices.”

¹⁷Douglas and Graham, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 895.

relationship with Christ (Matt 5:6). Christ is the only true hope and power available to people who struggle with ancestor spirits or paranormal activity.

Binding and loosing. Spiritual warfare advocates often use the term “binding the strongman” with reference to Matthew 12:29. These spiritual warfare proponents assume that the “strong man refers to evil spirits” and that “it would seem reasonable that the principle could be applied to a nation or a city or a people group as well as a house.”¹⁸ Wayne Grudem counters this power encounter interpretation with a clarifying thought about this passage: “Jesus had entered the strong man’s ‘house’ (the world of unbelievers who are under the bondage of Satan), and he was plundering his house, that is, freeing people from Satanic bondage and bringing them into the joy of the kingdom of God.”¹⁹ The task in binding and loosing should not be directed at the demonic, but rather efforts should be directed towards being used by God to set the prisoners of sin free through the blood of Christ (Zech 9:11).

Rebuking. When one senses a demonic presence, or experiences a demonic attack, many Christians utilize a process of rebuking. Rebuking usually involves the verbal confrontation of Satan and his demons. The practice derives from Scriptural instances where Christ rebukes both Satan (Matt 4:10, 16:23) and demons (Matt 17:18; Mark 1:25).²⁰ It can also be argued that rebuke is found in Paul’s condemnation and cursing of Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8-11) and his exorcism of the spirit in the soothsaying girl of Philippi (Acts 16:16-18). Zechariah 3:1-7 also describes God directly rebuking Satan by saying, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” An additional

¹⁸Wagner and Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 78.

¹⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 418.

²⁰John Franklin and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare: Biblical Truth for Victory* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2001), 153-54.

evidence of rebuking language is found in Jude 1:9 when the archangel Michael spoke to Satan saying, “The Lord rebuke you!”

Although there are some biblical examples for a verbal rebuke of the demonic, these examples demonstrate that it occurs in limited instances. Biblical rebukes are not formulaic, are brief, and are solely focused on the power and name of Christ. If a believer chooses to practice rebuking Satan and his demons, the rebuke should be specific to the situation, directly to the manifesting demon or Satan, and not done “with a spirit of arrogance,” understanding that our power and authority rests in Christ, not ourselves.²¹ Caution is urged in utilizing a rebuke, for both false teachers are condemned for their ignorant, hasty, pride-filled rebukes towards the demonic (2 Pet 2:10-13; Jude 1:8-11). If a believer chooses to speak aloud in a situation of spiritual warfare, he should not primarily address the enemy but rather focus his prayers and concerns towards God for His power and work in the saving and protection of souls.

Naming. Naming is a tactic believed to gain power or authority over demons by discovering their names. Advocates postulate that since Christ found the name of the demonized Gadarene to be ‘Legion’ (Mark 5:9,15), that one should likewise make the same practice with both individual and territorial spirits.²² “Legion” may be more descriptive of the plurality and multiplicity of the demons rather than a demon’s specific name. Even if that was one particular demon’s name, Christ’s awareness of its name gave him no additional power or ability to exorcise it, for He already possessed in His own nature and name, the sufficient power for exorcism as the Creator of all angelic beings (Isa 45:22-23; Rom 14:11). Identifying names of demons is not suggested, practiced, or recommended anywhere else in Scripture so it is unwise to make much of this method.

²¹Franklin and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare*, 153-54.

²²Wagner and Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 84.

Repentance issues. Some warfare practitioners make special mention of the importance of believers confessing and repenting of every known sin in fear that they may have given Satan a special gateway into their lives. They utilize long lists of possible sins and prayers of repentance and renouncement of Satan's lies.²³ They point to Acts 19:18 where believers came out after coming to faith, "confessing and divulging their practices."

Repentance is clearly important both in conversion and sanctification, but there are particular cautions that must be made to those who emphasize repentance and renouncement in spiritual warfare. Unbelievers should realize that repentance is necessary for salvation (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 20:21), but that once one is in Christ, "there is therefore now no condemnation" (Rom 8:1). Danger lies in repentance becoming a ritual or formula and not sincerely from the heart. There should not be an unhealthy fear of one's own limited ability to remember past sins, as if salvation is dependent on verbal confession of each and every past sin.

Vulnerability. Many are concerned with perceived levels of vulnerability to demons. Some argue that vulnerability can occur through "contact with physical objects," "the curses of others," "genealogical transmission," or due to "geographic location."²⁴ This view states that one should not be "outwitted by Satan" since one can anticipate and be aware of his "designs" (2 Cor 2:11).²⁵ In this passage Paul is not suggesting a cat and mouse game with Satan but rather, as seen in the context, is explaining that Satan seeks to destroy unity in the church through a lack of forgiveness (2 Cor 2:5-10).

²³Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 199-252.

²⁴Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 14-18; Rommen, *Spiritual Power and Missions*, 19.

²⁵Wagner and Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 76.

Nevertheless, vulnerability to items and locations continues as an issue that arises in spiritual warfare. Many are convinced that “demons can and do attach themselves to objects, to houses, or other buildings, to animals and to people.”²⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:18-20 is often referenced as support of this view in light of food being sacrificed to idols. In consideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, however, it is seen that the conscience, not the food, is the issue as it might cause concern in leading others astray. These passages do caution against provoking God to jealousy through carelessness in casually taking part in activities dedicated to demons.

A final vulnerability reference is given in Acts 19:19 where new believers burned their magic books. This action was not for fear of demonic power but rather served as a public act of repentance (renunciation and confession) of their changed lives. These scriptural examples are not about vulnerability to items or locations, but are about the changed heart Christ desires to see in believers.²⁷

Genealogical connections. Some claim that Satan has claims on people through multiple generations due to the sins of their ancestors. Kraft states that he uses “the power of Christ to break generational curses, vows, dedications and rights given to the enemy through sin by the person’s ancestors.”²⁸ Other advocates of generational sin point to passages such as Exodus 20:5, 34:7; Numbers 14:18; and Deuteronomy 5:9. This concept of demons passing through generations is one which “occasionally appears in animistic religions,” but that is not taught by Scripture.²⁹ Chuck Lawless and John Franklin point out that God is the actor in these passages, not Satan, and that the cross of

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷It is important to note that the Holy Spirit’s power is described as flowing in faith through objects such as Jesus’ cloak (Luke 8:44), handkerchiefs/aprons (Acts 19:12), and even shadows (Acts 5:15).

²⁸Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 216.

²⁹Rommen, *Spiritual Power and Missions*, 67.

Christ broke all curses so that the “old has passed away” and believers are free from the condemnation of their past (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:1).³⁰

Strategic Level (Territorial Spirits)

Strategic level spiritual warfare is an approach that confronts demonic spirits that are geographically assigned and of a higher power and responsibility among Satan’s workers. The concept behind this methodology is that if you can identify and map these demons you will gain a knowledge that helps you to free a particular geographical area from demonic oppression. This battle is viewed as happening in the air, but one that still affects believers on the ground. Emphasis is on repentance from the corporate sin in a particular nation or culture.

Strategic level warfare also upholds warfare prayer as a weapon that allows the gospel to go forth where it would not otherwise be able to take root. Some of these theories come from “tribal views of spiritual warfare” and although they are found in intertestamental Judaism, they are not supported within the New Testament.³¹ Chuck Lowe comments on the Reformers’ views, that “for Calvin, no less than for Luther, Scripture provides all that is needed for spiritual warfare.”³²

Territorial spirits are the main focus of strategic level spiritual warfare. This concept comes from the references to the Princes of Persia and Greece in Daniel 10:13, 20, 21; 12:1-2. Strategic level spiritual warfare advocates contend that “Satan does indeed assign a demon or a corps of demons to every geo-political unit in the world and that they are among the principalities and powers against whom we wrestle.”³³ Strategic

³⁰Franklin and Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare*, 155-58.

³¹Hiebert, *Case Studies in Missions*, 3; Chuck Lowe, *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation: A Biblical, Historical and Missiological Critique of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor/OMF, 1998), 84.

³²Lowe, *Territorial Spirits*, 97.

³³C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from*

level warriors also believe that as they come to know and understand the identities and rankings of the geo-political gods they can better pray against them so that that they can free “those who are perishing” from “having their minds blinded by the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4).³⁴ They consider their interaction with territorial spirits to be “major league warfare” in contrast to personal deliverance ministries and emphasize the need for expertise in this field, or “Satan will eat you for breakfast.”³⁵

Some of these strategic level spiritual warfare methods were known, but not practiced, during the middle ages.³⁶ Others point out that there is “little biblical warrant for a number of the teachings and practices associated with some forms of spiritual conflict which focus on territorial spirits.”³⁷ Wayne Grudem reinforces this point by stating,

in no instance does anyone in the New Testament (1) summon a “territorial spirit” upon entering an area to preach the gospel . . . or (2) demand information from demons about a local demonic hierarchy, (3) say that we should believe or teach information derived from demons, or (4) teach by word or example that certain “demonic strongholds” over a city have to be broken before the gospel can be proclaimed with effectiveness.³⁸

Strategic level spiritual warfare is mere speculation derived and reinforced by anecdotal evidence. A believer’s effectiveness in gospel sharing is solely dependent on Christ’s power.

The Believer as Proclaimer

Believers must be concerned with spiritual warfare in their own lives in order to be used effectively in evangelistic ministry and disciple making. Christians are

Nineteen Christian Leaders (Chichester, England: Sovereign World, 1991), 52.

³⁴Wagner and Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 75.

³⁵Ibid., 86-87.

³⁶Lowe, *Territorial Spirits*, 88.

³⁷Moreau, *Deliver Us from Evil*, xxvi.

³⁸Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 421.

reminded in Scripture of their need to “stand firm” (Eph 6:13) and “resist” (Jas 4:7) the devil. Satan’s testing of Job teaches Job to have an “increased awareness of God’s greatness and his own sinfulness” and of the “the necessity of submitting to God’s sovereign purposes.”³⁹ MacArthur points out Satan’s sifting of Peter being instructive for in Peter’s realization that “he could not stand on his own.”⁴⁰ Christians’ purpose is to love and glorify God and to make His glory and love known to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Matt 28:19; Mark 12:30,31). Biblical methods in spiritual warfare are seen in putting on the full armor of God daily and petitioning the Lord in prayer (Eph 6:10-20) so that he might provide the workers for the harvest (Luke 10:2).

Satan desires to disrupt and hinder the Christian witness. The devil opposed Paul as he sought to visit the church of Thessalonica. Both “the evangelist and the work of evangelism is opposed on every hand by tremendous spiritual forces.”⁴¹ The harassment of Christian witness is also seen in Paul’s description of his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7), a “messenger of Satan.” Whether this was an actual demon or some sort of physical or mental suffering is not significant. It is important to notice that in his suffering “Paul didn’t attempt to bind, rebuke, or cast out this satanic messenger. He simply prayed to the Lord for its removal. Certainly God was able to do as Paul prayed, but He chose not to.”⁴² Paul’s trust in God’s sovereignty is essential to understanding a biblical view of spiritual warfare.

Satan also wants to hinder Gospel work by giving practitioners “a false sense of victory in spiritual warfare.”⁴³ Lucifer wants believers to follow a ritualistic model for

³⁹MacArthur, *Standing Strong*, 31.

⁴⁰Ibid., 34.

⁴¹Graham, “Why the Berlin Congress?”

⁴²MacArthur, *Standing Strong*, 33.

⁴³Wagner and Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 86.

spiritual warfare, rather than an approach that is defined by Scripture and truth. Believers must realize that “conducting spiritual warfare by formula doesn’t work” for they “are not waging war according to the flesh,” but have divine power (2 Cor 10:3-4).⁴⁴

Summary of a Modern Understanding and Application of Spiritual Warfare

Evangelistic ministry intensifies spiritual warfare as “all evangelism involves spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil.”⁴⁵ In disciple making, Satan and his demons attack in order to “oppose the spiritual progress of God’s people (Eph 6:12).”⁴⁶ Although there are many strategies and tactics in this war, manmade designs will fail and “only spiritual weapons can prevail, especially the Word and the Spirit, with prayer.”⁴⁷ Scripture is the test of all contemporary and popular developments in spiritual warfare. Christian believers must engage non-believers and believers with truth through the Spirit’s power “to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel” and to “prevail over the forces of darkness.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴Lawless, *Discipled Warriors*, 214.

⁴⁵Nichols and Graham, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World*, 116.

⁴⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 472.

⁴⁷Nichols and Graham, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World*, 116.

⁴⁸“Cape Town Commitment—a Declaration of Belief and a Call to Action,” in *Lausanne 3: The International Congress on World Evangelization* (Cape Town, South Africa: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2010), 6.