



Spiritual Warfare

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Several years ago, I received a phone call from some friends, asking if I would be willing to help “cast out some demons” from a woman who claimed to be “possessed.” Apparently, some students from our college ministry had been out sharing the gospel on the campus that evening when they came across this woman. She sincerely seemed to want to be delivered from Satan’s control over her life, and since these students had no experience in such matters, they assumed I would know what to do.

When I received the call, I confess, I panicked. I had no interest in getting involved in this situation. Not only had I had very little experience in dealing with such matters, but I doubted whether I would be able to help out, anyway. I suspected that this woman was probably not “demon possessed” at all. Perhaps she had a mental illness. But I felt I should do something, so I decided to go to the student union to meet the woman.

When I arrived, I was surprised to find about fifteen college students waiting for me. The woman, who was dressed completely in black and was wearing satanic jewelry around her neck and wrists, sat nervously beside them. The students were relieved to see me. The “expert” had arrived! They didn’t realize how ill-equipped I felt I was to handle this situation.

Now before I tell you how this story ended, I’d like to lay some foundations related to the work of Satan in our lives and in this world. Many refer to this struggle involving devil and demonic forces as “spiritual warfare.”

The reality of Satan and his demonic helpers is evident throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Here are some examples:

- **The temptation of Eve:** By means of a “demonized”¹ snake. (Compare Genesis 3:1-5 with 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Revelation 20:1-2)

¹ The term “demonization” is discussed by C.Fred Dickason in *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Westchester, IL:Crossway Books, 1987), pp.37-45.

- **The affliction of Job:** Satan exercised some amazing powers in his campaign against Job. He incited Job's enemies to kill the servants of Job and to steal his cattle. He sent fire down from heaven, he manufactured a storm that destroyed the home where Job's children were, and he struck Job with boils.
- **The demonic hindrance to Daniel's prayers:** In Daniel 10, we read about an angel sent by God in response to Daniel's prayers. From this story, we can infer that there is often a battle going on in the spiritual realm, unbeknownst to us. Beginning in verse 12, an angel says to Daniel...

"Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.¹³ But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.¹⁴ Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come" (Daniel 10:12b-14).

- **The temptation of Jesus:** (Matthew 4:1-11)
- **The affliction of Paul in his flesh:** (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)
- **Satan's role in end time events:**

"The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders"
(2 Thessalonians 2:9).
- **Satan's final demise:** (Revelation 20)

The Apostle Paul spoke often about Satan's influence in this world. According to Arthur F. Glasser, "some mention of Satan or the [demonic] 'powers' is found in virtually every epistle the apostle Paul wrote."² For example, in Ephesians 6, we read:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"
(Ephesians 6:10-12).

²Arthur F. Glasser, *Spiritual Conflict: Global Issues Bible Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), p.22.

Without a doubt, the devil is often behind many of the struggles we face as Christians! From these verses, we can infer that there exists a demonic hierarchy. In other words, we have a well-organized enemy that is bent on our destruction.

Of course, Peter and James also wrote about the devil. In Peter's first epistle, we discover that Satan is behind the persecutions Christians face.

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings”
(1 Peter 5:8-9).

And James wrote, *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7b).

So if the reality of Satan and his work in this world are so prevalent in the Bible, why do so many Christians avoid this subject? I believe there are many reasons:

- We do not personally see much evidence of demonic activity in the world today.
- We (incorrectly) believe that spiritual warfare is no longer necessary because Christ has defeated Satan.
- We feel the subject is too confusing or divisive to address.
- We are afraid.

Two Main Approaches: The Truth Encounter and The Power Encounter

I would like to examine the two most common approaches to spiritual warfare, and then I would like to provide what I think is the primary way we can defeat the devil. (For the purposes of this paper, I will use the term “devil” or “Satan” to refer to the devil and/or his subordinates.)

The first approach to spiritual warfare is what is called the “classic” model, which basically utilizes the truth of God’s Word to combat the devil. This approach to spiritual warfare is sometimes referred to as a “truth encounter.”

The second approach to spiritual warfare is the “deliverance” model, which is sometimes referred to as a “power encounter.”

I would like to examine the two approaches in somewhat general terms, knowing that, even within these models, differences exist. At the outset, though, I think it is important to note that examples of both models can be found in the Bible.

In order to better understand the two approaches to spiritual warfare, I would like to evaluate three primary differences that I have noticed between them. As we explore those differences, I am hoping the model that is most biblical and effective will become obvious.

Three Main Differences:

1. A difference in scriptural emphasis.

The first significant difference that I have noticed between the “truth encounter” and the “power encounter” relates to the Biblical passages chosen to support each position. Although advocates of both positions would argue that they use the entire Bible to defend their position, there is a significant difference in *which biblical passages* are emphasized by each group.

Those who use **the classic approach** to biblical warfare rely most heavily upon **the Epistles** to defend their practices. Therefore, “power encounter stories” of Jesus casting out demons in the gospels or Paul’s encounter with a “demonized” slave girl (Acts 16) are not viewed as prescriptive because they are considered historical narratives, not doctrinal directives. In other words, these stories *should not* be used by Christians as a model for how we are to engage in spiritual warfare.

Dr. Terry Wise, in his book *Fundamentals of Spiritual Warfare*, notes:

“The truth encounter method stresses the content of the Epistles over the content of the Gospels. The claim is made that ‘power’ encounter events in the Gospels occurred *before* the Cross and therefore do not apply to believers today, because we live in the dispensation *after* the Cross. The Epistles are our main manual now, not the Gospels.”³

David Powlison states it this way:

“Thus Jesus’ ‘power’ encounters—with hunger, sickness, death and demonic suffering—are enacted parables. They gave an experience of heaven so that people might repent...and believe in the Savior.”⁴

³ Terry S. Wise, *Fundamentals of Spiritual Warfare* (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p.94.

⁴David Powlison, *Power Encounters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995) p.94.

He continues, “This explains why there are no commands or instructions in Scripture for us to do EMM (ekballistic mode of ministry).”⁵ (Ekballistic refers to the forceful casting out of demons.)

Those who use **the deliverance model** of spiritual warfare, on the other hand, seem to rely almost exclusively upon **the gospels** for their method of spiritual warfare. They emphasize that Jesus not only provided the example for us to follow, but he also delegated his authority to us to engage in spiritual warfare. The “deliverance” model of warfare can be summed up by C. Fred Dickason:

“The Great Commission indicates that Christ delegated to his disciples and to those who follow in their train that same authority over demons...the authority to successfully oppose and cast out demons still remains throughout the age until Jesus comes.”⁶

The teachings found in the Epistles, therefore, are usually minimized (in practice) by those in the deliverance “camp.” Powlison writes:

“Ekballistic ministry appears in four books of the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. These books naturally make the strongest case for—or against—the continuing use of EMM as a method of spiritual warfare.”⁷

Because of the emphasis upon looking to the gospels for direction concerning spiritual warfare, passages such as Ephesians 6:10-20 or 1 Peter 5:8-9, which directly relate to spiritual warfare, are not applied when confronting someone demonized (such as the woman I referred to earlier in this paper).

So how should we respond to the difference in scriptural emphasis between the classic and deliverance models of spiritual warfare?

Using the scriptural emphasis as a criteria for judging these two models, without a doubt, the classic approach to spiritual warfare is more consistent with how we are to interpret Scripture. It seems reasonable to me that **our doctrine should come primarily from the epistles, which are didactic, rather than the gospels**, which are historical in nature. When we are reading the gospels or the book of Acts, we need to be careful not to formulate doctrines from events which are merely historical in nature. We can learn from these stories, but we should be careful when

⁵ Ibid.,p.94.

⁶Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian*, p.273.

⁷Powlison, *Power Encounters*, p.63.

trying to use them to formulate our doctrinal position on a particular issue.

Now I am not suggesting that the example of Jesus and the apostles should be ignored. I think that it is significant that Paul used the deliverance approach in Acts 16 to cast out a demon from a slave girl. In Acts 16:18, we read that Paul turned to her and said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!”⁸ This clearly was a “power encounter.”

In many ways, the apostle Paul is the most significant representative of the “church age.” And, although some might argue that this incident was part of the “apostolic age,” with its signs and wonders, we have to conclude that it *may* be appropriate in the present age for someone to “cast out” a demon, *should God give that person the ability to do so*. The bottom line is this, though: although both the gospels and the epistles provide some insight into the nature of spiritual warfare, the emphasis should clearly be upon the epistles. Based upon the epistles, a “truth” encounter is the normative approach to spiritual warfare.

2. A difference in diagnosis.

The second difference I have noted between the classic model and the deliverance model for spiritual warfare has to do with the identification of the “enemy.” Although both models recognize that Christians fight battles on three levels: the world, the flesh, and the devil, they disagree as to the nature of the “typical” battle faced by Christians. Obviously, identification of the enemy is essential if we are to deal effectively with a spiritual problem.

The **classic approach** to spiritual warfare tends to emphasize that most battles that Christians face are primarily **moral in nature, involving the flesh, not the devil**. As a result of this perspective, they tend to de-emphasize the role that Satan plays in the Christian’s typical battle. Powlison writes:

“Contrary to EMM teaching, unclean spirits are never implicated as holding people in bondage to unbelief and sin. They are never portrayed as inhabiting and enslaving sinful parts of human personality.”⁹

Therefore, according to this position, we cannot blame our sins and moral failures on Satan. We need instead to realize that the real battle we face many times is not with the devil, but with the “flesh.” Powlison goes on to say:

“There was never a change in the actual methodology for dealing with moral evil: pride,

⁸ All scripture references are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (East Brunswick, N.J.:International Bible Society) by permission of the Lockman Foundation.

⁹ Powlison, *Power Encounters*, pp.67-68.

lust, anger, fear, lying, self-righteousness, drunkenness, unbelief, idolatry, occult practice, and all other sins that inhabit human hearts and lives. *Repeated sin puts people in moral bondage, but not in bondage to indwelling spirits.* (Emphasis is mine.)¹⁰

The classic approach identifies moral failures within the believer's life as sin; these failures are the result of disobedience. Although Satan can tempt the Christian in various areas, and he can get a "foothold" in our lives, ultimately we are responsible for our actions. We can never say, "The devil made me do it." And, if we are in "bondage" to a particular sin, we should not look to a demonic cause, but a fleshly one. We need to go to God's Word to understand the nature of the battle we face, and we need to apply God's truth to our situation. Sometimes, this will even mean sharing the gospel with a person. I consider a gospel presentation more consistent with the truth encounter than a power encounter. (In fact, some regard this as a third approach.)

I think some go too far with this approach. Nouthetic counselor, Jay Adams, believes that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life leaves no room for Satan's oppression of believers. In his extensive work, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, Adams hardly addresses the role of Satan in the life of the believer. In fact, he argues that the Christian cannot even be *oppressed* by demons:

"There is no biblical reason to think that demonic possession (or oppression) can occur in the life of a Christian. The simultaneous presence of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within every true child of God, and an 'unclean spirit', is impossible."¹¹

He goes on further to say:

"I have seen incompetence in counseling excused by resorting to the diagnosis of possession by demons, sometimes with very damaging effects. If, for example, one's problems are the result of his own sinful behavior, and they are instead charged to possession by an evil spirit, those problems may be complicated rather than solved by efforts to cast out the demon. Not only will such efforts fail, leading often to hopelessness and despair, but they will shift the focus from the counselee's own responsibility."¹²

The **deliverance approach** to spiritual warfare, on the other hand, tends to place most battles that

¹⁰ Ibid., p.74.

¹¹ Jay E. Adams, *The Big Umbrella*, pp.117-118, quoted in *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), p.17.

¹² Ibid., p.129, taken from *The Big Umbrella*, pp.120-121.

Christians face within the realm of spiritual warfare. The names of moral sins are often assigned to the demons controlling a person (e.g. “Lying Spirit” or “Sexual Perversion”). In his book, *The Authority of the Believer*, John A. MacMillan writes about an encounter a pastor friend of his had with a woman who was demonized. He writes:

“...eighteen separate demons left the body of their victim, each one identifying himself before he left by uttering his name. Most of the names given were those of spiritual states, such as ‘Fear,’ ‘Death,’ etc. But these were varied by others, such as ‘Chief,’ ‘Mug,’ ‘Legion,’ one calling himself ‘Chief Servant of Lucifer.’”¹³

The final demon to exit was called “Internal Masculinity Cacoethes.”¹⁴

Although there is some recognition that sinful behaviors may have lead to a demonic foothold in the Christian’s life, the deliverance approach to spiritual warfare has the tendency to de-emphasize the role of the flesh or the world in our spiritual struggles. **Every sin with which the Christian struggles becomes a demonic stronghold, rather than a struggle with the flesh.**

Francis MacNutt, in his book, *Healing*, demonstrates how we would therefore pray against spiritual demons when a person is involved in a moral sin of demonic origin, “...if homosexuality in a given instance should happen to be demonic in causation, then the prayer can be directed against a spirit of homosexuality.”¹⁵

So which model diagnoses the problem more accurately: the classic or the deliverance model? Once again, I would say that the classic approach to diagnosis is more consistent with Scripture. According to the classic approach, **the typical battle a Christian faces is a battle with the flesh, not the devil.** Although the devil may play a key role in the temptation of a believer, and he can indeed get a spiritual stronghold in a believer’s life (Ephesians 4:27), when the Bible addresses the subject of sin in the life of a believer, it is usually characterized as a battle with the flesh, not a battle with the devil. We read in Galatians 5:19-21:

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Emphasis is mine.)

Many of the “deeds” mentioned in these verses would seem to be demonic in nature or origin

¹³ John A. MacMillan, *The Authority of the Believer* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1997), p.93.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.94.

¹⁵ Francis MacNutt, *Healing*, (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Marie Press, 1974), p.223.

(see James 3:14-15), but God deals with them as fleshly sins, and God's remedy for the dealing with these moral issues is to walk in the Spirit, not command various spirits to leave.

Having said this, I disagree with Adams' perspective that a Christian cannot even be oppressed by Satan because he or she has the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts, Ananias was asked by Peter, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"¹⁶ In Ephesians 4:17, we see the devil uses unresolved anger against us. We are warned about giving the devil a foothold in our lives. Sometimes our sins are directly related to the influence of Satan or his demons. Sometimes through a careful interview process, I believe it is possible to identify the source of a person's struggle as being either of the flesh, of the devil or of both.

But then what? What should we do if we believe we are actually dealing with a situation involving Satan or one of his helpers?

3. A difference in methodology.

Here we come to what I believe is the biggest difference between the two approaches to spiritual warfare: methodology. The classic and the deliverance models differ greatly in the methods used to gain the victory in spiritual warfare.

David Powlison summarizes **the classic position** by saying:

"The leading elements of the "classic" mode of spiritual warfare are best captured by Ephesians 6:10-20: reliance on the power and protection of God, embracing the Word of God, specific obedience, fervent and focused prayer, and the aid of fellow believers...Christians fight spiritual warfare by repentance, faith and obedience."¹⁷

A deliberate focus on the present is emphasized as opposed to a focus on the past. Adams writes, "Some persons focus on the past. So long as they do, change will not be possible, since no one can change the past."¹⁸

The **classic approach** focuses on **appropriating the truth of God's Word to our lives** in order to find healing or "deliverance." With the power of the Holy Spirit, God's Word and fellowship, we can overcome. We apply the armor of God to our lives, and we repent of sins that we may be committing. We forgive others, even as we have been forgiven. The suggested solutions do not

¹⁶ Acts 5:3.

¹⁷ Powlison, *Power Encounters*, p.36.

¹⁸ Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, p. 172.

include binding the devil or demons, addressing demons by name, or dealing with ancestral or territorial demons.

The **deliverance approach** to spiritual warfare, on the other hand, relies upon **the believer's authority in Christ and the identification and removal of demons** which may be inhabiting or influencing an individual. Demons are commanded to leave based upon our Christ-delegated authority. Through an interview process, which may involve both present and familial and ancestral issues, demonic strongholds and the presence of demons are identified. Should no demonic presence be observed, the approach to deliverance seems to resemble that of the classic mode of spiritual warfare.

C. Fred Dickason speaks about the delegated authority of the Christian in this way:

“The Great Commission indicates that Christ delegated to His disciples and to those who follow in their train that same authority over demons. The miraculous powers may be now withheld by the purpose of God (see chapter 13), but the authority to successfully oppose and cast out demons still remains throughout the age until Jesus comes (Matthew 28:18-20).¹⁹

Ironically, Dr. Wise, who holds to a more classic approach to spiritual warfare, concurs with this perspective. He writes:

“In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, which of course applies to all believers, Jesus makes it clear that He calls us and sends us under His authority. Those who go and make disciples operate with delegated authority over Satan and demons. Since the Great Commission applies to each believer, every Christian has this delegated authority.”²⁰

The issue of the believer's authority is the key to understanding the deliverance approach to spiritual warfare.

In addition to the authority of the believer, the deliverance approach provides other steps which may be necessary in order for deliverance to take place. Merrill Unger, in his book, *What Demons Can Do to Saints*, describes ten steps to deliverance from demonic activity. He writes that we must face the enemy, trust Christ, confess our sins, renounce our sins, experience actual liberation, destroy every occult object, sever every mediumistic contact, repudiate every vestige of demonized religion, steer clear of magic, and yield ourselves wholly to God.²¹

¹⁹ Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian*, p.273.

²⁰ Wise, *Fundamentals of Spiritual Warfare*, p.133.

²¹ The steps are expanded upon in chapter 12, Merrill F. Unger, *What Demons Can Do*

Which Approach is Correct?

Which perspective on the method of deliverance is most biblical? I am of the opinion that, in almost every case, **the classic approach to spiritual warfare is, once again, more appropriate.** Why? Because that approach is most consistent with New Testament teaching related to spiritual warfare. I believe that **Ephesians 6:10-20 provides us with the clearest instructions as to how we are to deal with Satan and his minions.**

I have several problems with the deliverance approach to spiritual warfare. First, the approach tends to place blame for sinful behaviors on demons, rather than on the individuals committing the sins. Satan gets blamed for our sins and shortcomings.

Second, I find the argument that we have delegated authority through the Great Commission to be weak. Jesus' instructions to his disciples before he ascended into heaven related more to spreading the gospel than to dealing with spiritual adversaries. (I have noticed that many who hold the position of the believer's authority over demons also claim that we have authority over sickness, disease and a host of other "situational evils", as Powlison refers to them.)

And when it comes to the practice of commanding demons to leave, I think a warning is in order—and perhaps, a little humility. I take seriously the warning found in the book of Jude:

"But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them" (Jude 1:9-10). (Emphasis is mine.)

If the archangel Michael did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against the devil, by what authority should we do it? Perhaps we don't understand the authority and power "Lucifer" has been given by God.

I like Michael's approach to dealing with the devil: "The Lord rebuke you!" Merrill Unger writes, "It is futile to face the foe if you do not know and trust the Victor over the foe. Jesus Christ is the Victor. He alone is able to set the captives of Satan free."²² Merrill then admits, "Although our Lord is the sole source of help, the Spirit of God uses pastors and counselors in the process."²³

to Saints (Chicago: Moody Press), pp.172-196.

²² Unger, *What Demons Can Do To Saints*, p.175.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.176.

Some Conclusions

We have looked at three differences between the classic and deliverance models of spiritual warfare: the scriptural emphasis, the diagnosis, and the methodology. What conclusions can we draw?

When it comes to scriptural emphasis, diagnosis and methodology, I am convinced that the classic approach is more appropriate. Although both approaches have some extreme positions (e.g. Adams' denial of demonic oppression of a believer), the typical approach we need to take is a classic approach:

- **Scriptural emphasis:** Rely heavily upon the New Testament epistles for our doctrinal position on this subject, especially passages such as Ephesians 4:27, 6:10-20; James 4:7; and 1 Peter 5:8.
- **Diagnosis:** Regard most battles people face as being related to the flesh rather than a demonic presence. (Galatians 5:13-26)
- **Methodology:** Apply scriptural truth to the situation. Sometimes this will involve leading a person to faith in Jesus Christ. Other times, it will involve finding verses in the Bible which apply to a particular situation. Of course, we can always apply the verses mentioned above under the first bullet “Scriptural emphasis.” Also, truths related to our identity in Christ (Ephesians, chapters 1-3) and the role of God’s Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:1, 13-26 and Romans 8:1-14) are also particularly helpful.

Finally, I have personally concluded that there are occasions—though they will be very rare in *this country*—where the power encounter is the appropriate method of deliverance. Some pastors within the Great Commission Association of Churches disagree with the idea of ever having to use a power encounter when confronting a demonic presence, but I believe we may face a situation on a rare occasion where a person is truly indwelt by a demon(s), and we may need to say, “The Lord rebuke you!” I tend to place “casting out demons” in the same category as healing, tongues, prophesy, and other sign gifts. God may choose to exercise any of these “gifts” at any time, but they are not normative in our culture at the present time.

In the personal story I used to introduce this paper, the woman I described was freed from the demons who oppressed her. After asking her a number of questions and getting her to renounce her involvement in witchcraft and Satanism, we began to pray for her, as several students surrounded her and placed their hands upon her shoulders.

At the time, I did not have the confidence (faith) to personally command the demons to leave her, as Paul did in the book of Acts, but I did have faith in God, who is greater than the devil.

We prayed specifically that God would deliver this woman from Satan's power over her life, and that *he* would command the demon(s) to leave. As we prayed, the woman began to shake violently. Then she collapsed to the floor in convulsions. We all continued to pray. The nature of my prayer was, "Father, please deliver her in the name of your Son, the Lord Jesus."

Suddenly, the woman stopped shaking and became deathly still. I wondered if she was O.K. We called her name repeatedly and she finally opened her eyes. We helped her up, and I shared the gospel with her. She prayed to receive Christ and immediately proceeded to remove the satanic jewelry from her neck, wrists and fingers. She also took off the long black coat she had been wearing and handed it to me. "I won't be needing these any longer," she said.

Then she said something interesting. She said, "For the first time in a long time, I am alone. It's so peaceful." What she meant by this was that she no longer felt "a presence" in her life. We talked for a while, and then some of the students who were with me that evening went to her house and gathered up all her books, candles and other items related to witchcraft, and they burned them or threw them away. The woman then began faithfully attending the church and growing in her new walk with God.

Some Practical Applications

I believe the devil uses five main tactics against us: **deception, division, distraction, disqualification, discouragement and destruction.** Our challenge is to properly identify the tactic he is using and respond appropriately. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, "*We are not unaware of his schemes.*"

- **Deception:** Satan is called "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

We saw the first evidence of that back in the Garden of Eden. Satan will often tell half-truths. I believe that he and his minions are capable of whispering lies to you, lies such as: God does not love you. He is not interested in your welfare. Or, your sin is too big to forgive.

Often he whispers lies about other people. He especially likes to spread lies about spiritual leaders.

- **Division:** Satan loves to "divide and conquer" (James 3:14-16).

I think Satan is behind the divisions we see in the church and even in our marriages. Paul wrote that our struggle was not against flesh and blood. Sometimes, our enemy is not the person in front of us, but the devil, who is using that person.

- **Distraction:** I have noticed that at particular seasons of our ministry when the gospel is about to go out boldly, we suddenly begin to face an increasing number of major problems in the church. I realize God wants to do something through my life or ministry, and

suddenly, I find myself being distracted by a host of little problems, like foxes in the vineyard.

- **Disqualification:** Often Satan's temptations have this as a goal. At the outset of an opportunity for God to use us in some way, the devil tries to get us to fall into some sin area. Remember the temptation of Jesus? It occurred right before Jesus was going to begin his public ministry. Satan knew if he could get Jesus to fail, he could never fulfill his purpose.

Paul wrote, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." There is some discussion about what it means to be disqualified. At the very least, I think it has the idea of being sidelined from a particular opportunity to serve. A minister who "falls" into immorality is disqualified from further service at that church.

- **Discouragement:** One of the best ways he does this is to accuse us. Satan is called the "accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:10). He accuses us before God (remember the story of Job), but he also plants accusing thoughts in our own minds. He and his host whisper things like "You are no good. You are worthless." Or he says things like, "You are going to fail. You do not have any spiritual gifts. Nobody likes you."

Quite a few godly people in the Bible faced a considerable amount of discouragement. Often, though not always, Satan is behind it.

- **Destruction (or death):** Satan is a murderer (John 8:44). It was Satan who tempted Judas to betray the Lord, and it was likely Satan who incited him to take his own life. Satan is also behind persecutions against Christians. In 1 Peter 5:8, we read, "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" Devour is a pretty strong word. Satan wants to destroy us in anyway he can.

The Armor of God

As I said earlier, the one passage in Scripture that I believe provides the greatest clarity as to how to deal with the devil is Ephesians 6:10-20. Paul describes in these verses the spiritual struggle we will all encounter if we are children of God. According to the Greek scholar **Thayer**, the word "struggle" in verse 12 is an athletic term that was used for wrestling. It referred to *a contest between two in which each endeavors to throw the other, and which is decided when the victor is able to press and hold down his prostrate antagonist, namely, hold him down with his hand upon his neck.*

We have a spiritual enemy with whom we wrestle. The stakes are high. How do we defeat this enemy?

Paul uses the analogy of a Roman soldier to help us understand what we have at our disposal in this struggle. At the time Paul penned his letter to the Ephesians, he was a prisoner in Rome. I

suspect as he wrote his letter, he observed the Roman soldiers guarding him. Roman soldiers were amazing in biblical times, almost undefeatable because of their discipline and skill. Paul noticed that each piece of the soldier's armor was purposeful and essential for victory, and he used that armor to illustrate the equipment we have to overcome the enemy.

Paul begins by saying, "*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power*" (Ephesians 6:10). We need God's power if we are to succeed! Too many approaches to spiritual warfare leave God out of the mix!

Next, Paul notes that we need the "whole armor of God." Any missing piece will make us vulnerable to the enemy. So what are the pieces of the armor and what do they represent?

1. The belt of truth:

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist..." (Ephesians 6:14).

According to Dr. Terry Wise, the pieces of the armor are listed in the order in which they would have been put on. In ancient times, the belt held the soldier's garments together and served as a place on which to hang his armor. It secured parts of the garments that were hanging down and provided ease of movement. The belt was key to the soldier's ability to fight unhindered, without his garments getting in the way.

Now if you are in a battle, you cannot afford to get tripped up with part of your garment hanging down. So how does the belt of truth apply to us? I have two applications. First, **stand firm in the truth**. Too often people get tripped up because they believe lies. We need to be walking in what God says is true. But second, and perhaps Paul's main application, is that we need to **walk in truth or integrity**. David wrote, "*Blessed is the man...in whose spirit is no deceit*" (Psalm 32:2a, c). Paul wrote, "*So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*" (Acts 24:16).

When we do not walk in integrity, we get tripped up. If we say lies or we are living a lie, we provide the devil with an opportunity to discredit us.

2. The breastplate of righteousness:

"...with the breastplate of righteousness in place." (Ephesians 6:14b)

Since this is something *we* put on, it cannot refer to positional righteousness, which God provides. Therefore, I think the application is to live a godly life. The phrase *breastplate* of righteousness should be understood to mean *breastplate which consists of righteousness*. The breastplate, which protects the chest and heart, is righteousness. In other words, **one of the best**

defenses we have against the devil is to walk rightly before God and others. Satan wants to attack our character or our reputation. He is called “the accuser of the brethren.” What if he cannot find a basis for accusation against us? (Remember he tried to attack Job’s character without success.) I am convinced that living rightly before God and others provides us with some significant protection against the devil. Some references that I think capture the idea are Isaiah 59:17, 1 Peter 3:16 and 1 Timothy 1:19-20.

“He put on righteousness as his breastplate...” (Isaiah 59:17a)

“... [keep] a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1 Peter 3:16)

“... [hold] on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.” (1 Timothy 1:19-20)

3. The sandals:

“...and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.”
(Ephesians 6:15)

The soldiers’ feet were bound with thongs over the instep and around the ankle. But the most interesting thing about the sandals was that the soles were studded with nails to give firm footing in the case of an attack.

Although some people believe that this verse means we are to be ready at all times to share the gospel message with others, I think Paul has something else in mind. The word “readiness” in Ephesians 6:15 can be translated as “foundation”. I believe the idea here is that our sandals need to be able to give us the ability to stand securely. They provide for us a firm foundation.

The word *gospel* literally means *good news*, but here, I do not believe it refers to “The Gospel message.” I believe Paul is saying here that **we need to stand firmly in the good news (gospel) that we are at peace with God.** We are also stand firmly in the peace God provides.

Another way to put it is...

- Peace with God:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

- Peace from God:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which

transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Satan will not easily defeat us if we are walking in the good news that we are at peace with God and have a peace he provides.

4. The shield:

“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16).

I believe this refers to **placing our confidence in God and his Word** in the midst of our time of testing.

There are a couple of different Greek words for “shield” that are translated in our English Bibles. One refers to a small shield. The other, which is the word used here, refers to a large shield. The word “shield” in this verse actually comes from the Greek word for “door”. It was shaped like a door and measured 2 ½ feet by 4 ½ feet. It was big enough to protect the entire body of one who hid behind it.

Faith in God and his promises will allow us to face the attacks of the devil with confidence and steadfastness. Without faith, we become like those James describes in his first chapter:

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, **he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind**”* (James 1:5-6). (Emphasis is mine.)

It was faith in God and his promises that allowed Jesus to stand firm against Satan when he was tempted in Matthew 4.

5. The helmet:

“Take the helmet of salvation...” (Ephesians 6:17a)

I believe this refers to holding **onto the expectation of victory** we have through Jesus Christ. The helmet, of course, protects the mind. I do not think our eternal salvation is what is being described here. Why? Because eternal salvation is not something *we* put on; it is something God provides. Salvation simply means “deliverance.” I think that putting on the helmet refers to **the hopeful mindset concerning the victory that is ours through Christ**. Perhaps the phrase that captures it best is “confident hope.” Paul captures the idea well in 1 Thessalonians 5:8:

“But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a

breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet” (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

We know that we have the ultimate victory through Christ. We know that one day, he will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. We know that he is available now to save us. That hope can sustain us when we are going through a difficult time.

And finally,

6. The sword:

“Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17b).

Jesus, of course, used the word of God when he was tempted by the devil. So should we. We need to learn to use the Word of God effectively in the midst of the battle.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

In Summary

So here is the summary:

- Belt – integrity and truth
- Breastplate – righteous living
- Sandals – peace with and from God
- Shield – faith in God and his promises
- The helmet – hope for the present and the future
- The sword – God’s word

When we think of the term “spiritual warfare,” we often think of a very “spiritual” approach to fighting the devil, but these armor pieces are very practical in nature. The starting point, of course, is to rest in God’s strength and power. But then, we are to walk in such a way, through Christ, that the enemies’ arrows cannot find their target in us. The devil has little to work with when we walk in integrity, live righteously, live in God’s peace, hold onto faith, being mindful of the victory God promises us, and when we effectively use the only offensive piece of the armor: the sword, which is the Word of God.

But there is one last piece to the puzzle. After Paul discussed the various pieces of the armor, he added in verse 18:

“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” (Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer is essential in our fight against the devil. It was Daniel's perseverance in prayer that finally broke through the spiritual battle that was taking place behind the scenes. Although there are practical things we can do to combat the devil (e.g. placing on the armor of God), ultimately the battle belongs to the Lord, and prayer somehow opens the door to God's power. We need to be people who persevere in prayer.