

Understanding Spiritual Warfare

The Church Militant: On the Front Lines in a Messy War

Our son Michael leaves for an Air Force deployment to Iraq/Kuwait in three weeks. Although there is a fragile truce in place, the entire region remains a combat zone.

You face no less a daunting battle in an invisible war. If you call yourself Christian, you will find yourself in the heat of battle more often than not, on a daily basis. It is a jungle out there, as Jesus says He sends us as “lambs among wolves.”¹ But He doesn’t send us without weapons and a strategy, so let’s learn to use both. And we are to always look to Jesus, our Savior, who came precisely to free us from evil (1 John 3:8). There is hope: God has the power to conquer evil, and He has a plan, revealed in Genesis 3:15, to rescue us from the Evil One’s grip.

The first step in any conflict is to “know your enemy.” We find that enemy surface early in the pages of Scripture, in the third chapter of Genesis. Slowly review that chapter before we begin and **examine the Biblical worldview of evil.**

Do evil spirits exist? Is Satan real? Many scoff today at what cannot be seen or measured. But the Scriptural worldview reveals:

*There has been a Fall causing man to be wounded and broken.

*Evil is bigger than we are, as it is supernatural, and Satan is relentlessly orchestrating opposition to God.

* “Precisely because of the enormity of this vast evil, we need a Savior to rescue us. Anointed with the Holy Spirit and God’s power, Jesus frees us from the dominion of the devil (Acts 10:38). Freeing us in this way required God’s power, which Jesus shared with His disciples (see Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:1; Luke 10:1, 9).

*Later the entire community was filled with this power at Pentecost (see Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-4). The early Church, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, proceeded to preach Good News, demonstrating it by healing the sick and casting out evil spirits.

All this is traditional teaching of Christianity. But we cannot really understand it until we come to grips with certain realities:

1. Evil is something we cannot overcome by simple human good will and teaching. Evil is at its root, demonic and too great for us to overcome.
2. It is for this purpose that Jesus came: to overcome evil.
3. Evil can only be overcome by the power of God, given to us by the Holy Spirit.”²

Summary:

The bad news: You’re in a war, like it or not.

¹ Luke 10:3

² MacNutt, Francis. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual*. ©2009 by Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI, pp 51-52.

The Good News: “Jesus is with us and has given us the power to overcome the evil that is in the world, constantly moving us in the direction of health and freedom.”³ Satan is no match for Jesus.

So:

Let’s look at a few terms and concepts before we explore how to conduct ourselves in this perpetual struggle.

1. Why do we sin?
2. What are we up against?
3. What are strongholds?
4. What are open doors?

Then, finally, what are we to do?

1. Put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18)
2. Reasons why we fight with hope and confidence

Why do we sin?

CCC 397: “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart, and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be _____ toward God and lack of _____ in his goodness.”

Read Gen 3:6-7. Eve was not tricked by Satan. She knew God’s boundaries and overstepped them purposefully and willingly. When have you done what you wanted to do, knowing full well that it goes against God’s commands and warning? What was the result? _____

Ponder your latest sin. How does it betray a basic distrust of God or blatant disobedience?

“Two and only two ways are open for us in this life: the way of obedience to God and the way of disobedience. These roads lead to two different destinations just as surely as two different physical roads lead to two different physical destinations.”⁴

Are you really convinced that God is good?

“Satan’s greatest victories and our biggest defeats come when he gets us to ask, ‘Should I choose what God commands me.... or should I do what’s best for me?’ The very framing of the question shows how badly we’re deceived. We will not consistently choose God’s way until we come to understand that His way is *always* best for us.”⁵

If you trusted Him at His Word,

³ *School of Healing Prayer: Student Manual: Level 1*. Produced by Christian Healing Ministries. © 2007 by Christian Healing Ministries, Inc., Jacksonville, Fla, pp 71.

⁴ Kreeft, Peter. From his book “You Can Understand the Bible.” Excerpt used by *Daily Catholic Wisdom*, accessed on-line November 19, 2020, from yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org.

⁵ Alcorn, Randy. *The Purity Principle*. © 2003 by Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, OR, pp 18.

*that His plans for you (are) plans for your welfare, not for woe!- plans to give you a future full of hope” (Jeremiah 29:11);

*that “God is for you (and not against!)” (Romans 8:31),
would you trust Him more and disobey His commands less? _____

Note that “the devil and his demons do not deny God’s existence in Scripture; they even proclaim Jesus’ identity clearly and plainly (in Matthew 4:3-10; Matthew 8:29; Luke 4:33-34). The devil’s time isn’t spent trying to convince us that God doesn’t exist but rather that we cannot trust God. That was the original lie, the first lie breathed in paradise.”⁶

While Satan is a Liar, God is a promise keeper. There are over 4,000 promises in the Bible. And what is the one thing that God’s promises all have in common? They all have the same goal: your salvation.”⁷

Putting God at the Center

What is the first and most important Commandment? Exodus 20:3 _____

How did Satan tempt Eve to replace God? _____

In what ways do you try to be God today? How do you not ‘let’ God be God in your life? _____

Did Jesus “grasp at equality with God”? Philippians 2:6-8 _____

Rather, what attitudes did He model instead? “He _____ (v 7) himself and _____ (v 8) himself.” God will meet you in the Valley of Humility if you have the mindset of one who is a living sacrifice.

What is the first miracle of Christ in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:21-28)? _____

“Jesus drives out an unclean spirit from a man in the Capernaum synagogue. And he wants to perform the same cleansing operation in our lives. What God intended from the beginning is that our hearts be temples of his presence. But when Christ comes into the world, what does he find? He finds that the temple of our heart is filled up with all sorts of things that are not the divine power. Money, worldly success, the esteem of others, sex—whatever it is, it has now taken the place that rightfully belongs to God. Therefore, when Christ comes into your life, he will always have a cleansing role to play.

Fulton Sheen once talked about the ‘explosive power’ of Christ. When you place him in the center of your soul, he will expel all those things that don’t belong in that center and make them find their proper place.

And so Jesus the nonviolent warrior, Jesus the Judge, God’s own mind, now comes into our hearts when we invite him through conversion. He will have this cleansing authority and cleansing power.”⁸ How have you experienced Jesus “clean up your Temple”? _____

⁶ Hart, Mark. The ‘R’ Father. © 2010 by *The Word Among Us Press*, Frederick, MD, pp 155-156.

⁷ Ibid, pp 163.

⁸ Barron, Bishop Robert. *Daily Gospel Reflections from Bishop Barron*, January 12, 2021. Accessed on-line from wof@wordonfire.org.

As Christians, we are freed FROM sin in order to live IN God. See Romans Chapter 6. Is sin to have any power over you? Why? Romans 6:14. _____

“Jesus took on our nature in order to give us His! That’s grace. We don’t go to heaven to get a glimpse of the Trinity but to be IN the Trinity. What if we’re only here to discover that He’s a good, good Father and we’re beloved children.”⁹

Remember: “Jesus did not come to give us a stricter moral code but to give us the needed power (Holy Spirit) and capacity to become the true master of our own deep impulses.”¹⁰

What are we up against?

From Adam and Eve’s encounter with Satan in Genesis 3, it is apparent that we MUST be able to recognize Truth vs Satan’s lies. We must be able to recognize a lie for what it is. Do you know Jesus/God and His characteristics? Do you know who you are in Christ and what authority He has given you to do successful combat? Have you discovered God’s tender heart as Father and Jesus’ heart as Bridegroom? How has Bible Study helped you know Truth? _____

Note: Satan’s strategy: He will always minimize sin and cast it as attractive, as he did to Eve—but once the sin is committed, he will act as an incessant accuser, reminding you of it and barraging you that you are too sinful for God to ever want you again. How is Satan an accuser of Joshua the High Priest depicted in Zechariah 3:1-5? Revelation 12:10? _____

What do you learn about the highly organized Satanic kingdom, in Ephesians 6:12? _____

The satanic forces do not have bodies as we do, rule by domination (unlike God), and are many in number (‘hosts’ indicate an army). Satan and his demons resist God’s people and purposes.

What are Strongholds?

Review 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

A sin can become a habit, and a habit becomes a stronghold.

How is the battlefield first and foremost in the mind, according to these verses in 2 Corinthians? How does one “take every thought captive to Christ”? Give an example. _____

When the wrong thoughts come, we correct them, replacing them with God’s truth. We tend to be most vulnerable to temptation when tired, isolated, lonely, depressed, angry, or struggling with relationships.

What are Open Doors?

⁹ Hahn, Scott. Presentation at the 2017 *Defending the Faith Conference*, Franciscan University, in Steubenville, OH.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, (172).

“Now let’s look at a very important truth in spiritual warfare. Paul tells us that WE are the determining factor in whether the devil can operate in our life or not. He says in Ephesians 4:27- ‘Leave no room (or open door) for the devil.’ When we allow openings in our spiritual life the devil feels he has the right to take advantage of us in those specific territories. If we keep the doors closed he can’t do what he would like to do.

How does the Bible introduce us to the open door principle in Genesis 4:7? _____

God told Cain that Satan was crouched at his doorway, waiting to leap into his life. Cain had the choice and because he chose to open the door to jealousy, Satan led him to murder his brother Abel. Sin is progressive. One thing leads to another until we find ourselves in big trouble.

Open doors can be caused by:

(1) Lineage- Inherited weaknesses from our family lineage is an area that we should examine closely. Our ancestors may have done things we are completely unaware of that can still affect us today. Exodus 20:5. (We will explore generational healing in a future lesson).

(2) Crisis- an emotional or physical crisis can leave doors open that we must go back and close so the enemy will not continue to hassle us in that part of our life. Forgiveness is important to practice to remain unentangled.

(3) Ignorance- Ignorance of the Word can leave openings in our defenses that are devastating. Paul warns six times in his epistles: ‘Do not be ignorant.’ Also, see Hosea 4:6.”¹¹

The Holy Spirit works hard to convict us of those areas that are vulnerable to attack. “He will urge us to repent and change before Satan builds strongholds in our thinking. However, it is still up to us to see that these opened doors are slammed shut and forever closed. But what happens if we ignore the Holy Spirit’s pleading? What if we allow sin, willfully permitted temptation, or wrong attitudes to persist in our lives, unconfessed and unchanged? In that case, we are leaving gaping holes through which the enemy will seek to undo us. The truth is, most spiritual destruction is avoidable, but only if we reverently listen to the pleading of the Holy Spirit and obey His warnings to us.”¹²

Can you identify any present “open doors” in your life now? _____

Not one of us has surrendered all parts of her life to Jesus to rule completely. St Paul describes the struggle well in Romans 7:19-20. To the degree that sin resides within us, our freedom of action is compromised. “There are various levels of demonic activity, ranging all the way from temptation and other outside attacks; to demonization, in which we are influenced from the inside; on up to (rare) possession, in which we are under compulsion to perform evil.”¹³

¹¹ Robeson, Jerry and Carol. *Strongman’s His Name... What’s His Game?* © 1996 by Shiloh Publishing House, Woodburn, OR, pp 3-5.

¹² Renner, Rick. *Dressed to Kill: A Biblical Approach to Spiritual Warfare and Armor.* © 2007 by Teach All Nations, Tulsa, OK, pp 42-43.

¹³ MacNutt, Francis. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual.* © 2009 by Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI, pp 78.

What are we to do?

“If you are already a part of God’s kingdom, then you are at war with the kingdom of Satan. You simply need to recognize this reality, become spiritually equipped, and learn how to fight against Satan’s kingdom—because if you don’t, you are going to be a casualty of spiritual warfare.”¹⁴

How are we to battle effectively and with discernment? Following is the winning strategy:

1. Invite the Holy Spirit daily to battle with and for you.

You cannot fight this war without spiritual power. “The gift of the Holy Spirit must be accompanied by our free choice to follow His inspiration and guidance. If we do not choose to resist sin, the Spirit cannot help us, for He will not violate our freedom. However, if we make even a weak resolve to struggle against temptation and sin, the Holy Spirit can rush into us and fortify that weak resolve, giving us enough strength to resist the deadly sins with greater effectiveness.”¹⁵

Our reliance must always be on the power of God. See Zechariah 4:6. The battle is the Lord’s (1 Samuel 17:47a). Pray frequently throughout the day: “Come, Holy Spirit!”

2. “Be on your guard” (2 Peter 3:17).

James 4:7 puts it simply: “Resist the devil and he will _____.” Peter likewise admonishes us to “be sober and vigilant” (1 Peter 5:8) and to “resist him” (1 Peter 5:8). Will God help us resist and find a way out of the trap of temptation? See 1 Corinthians 10:13

3. Receive the Eucharist as often as possible. Being covered by the Blood of Jesus is the best safeguard and source of strength/power. Christ’s grace available in the sacraments has sin-vanquishing power. “Christ’s mercy was too immense to allow innocence to be destroyed without showing a way to restore it. So he gave us the sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist which restore people to pristine innocence. It is yours for the asking, because he is in love with you.”¹⁶

4. Go to Confession frequently so that you can experience forgiveness and healing, and so that “no bitter root will spring up and cause trouble” (Hebrews 12:15). God wants to separate you from what separates you from Him!

“After Confession, I sometimes feel like a tired traveler who at last has put his load down.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Prince, Derek. *Pulling Down Strongholds*. © 2013 by Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA, pp 33-34.

¹⁵ Spitzer, Fr Robert, SJ. From his book “Escape From Evil’s Darkness.” Excerpt used on *Daily Catholic Wisdom*, accessed on-line March 2, 2021, at yourfriends@catholicwisdom.org.

¹⁶ Doherty, Catherine. *Beginning Again*. © 2004 by Madonna House Publications, Combermere, ON, pp 9.

¹⁷ Doherty, Catherine. *Beginning Again*. © 2004 by Madonna House Publications, Combermere, ON, pp 36.

5. Praise and Worship!

Review Joshua 6:1-27. Given that the priests were leading the people around the perimeter of Jericho, worshipping, what does this imply for how we are to handle insurmountable obstacles in our lives? (The Canaanites were bitter enemies of the Jews, whose lineage we will explore in the next chapters of Genesis). _____

6. Pray the Rosary, a prayer of encounter with Jesus. Why go to Our Lady? She's already crushed Satan's head! The Rosary is a weapon of grace.

7. Resist Satan the way Jesus did, with the Word of God (Matthew 4:1-11). The better we know God's Word, the keener our spiritual senses will be to detect Satan's lies and traps. 1 John 4:1-6.

8. Use the power and intercession of the Communion of Saints. Hebrews 12:1-2

9. Use your Christ-given authority.

Write Luke 9:1-3 here: _____

Do you act in your daily life as though Jesus has delegated to you great "power and authority"? Why or why not? _____

"Unlike power, authority is not a gift; it comes through a relationship with He who has all authority and is only as deep as your relationship with the Father."¹⁸

Never forget that Jesus and Satan are not equals. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, second Person of the Trinity, God Himself. Satan is merely an angel.

Which of the above nine strategies will you intentionally put into practice this week? _____

Put on the Armor of God

Why are you as a Christian so important? Because only the Christian church has the 'military hardware' to intervene in the spiritual realm and push back the kingdom of Satan.

Review Ephesians 6:10-18.

What hope is there? -- Reasons Why We Fight with Hope & Confidence

1. Jesus will make us new. Write out 2 Corinthians 5:17 _____

¹⁸ Jackson, John Paul. CD: "Power and Authority."

2. Jesus will keep us from falling if we turn to Him. Write out Jude 24. (There is only one chapter of Jude). _____

3. Jesus will “deliver us from the Evil One” (Lord’s Prayer).

“I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell” (Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday, CCC, 635).

4. Satan is no match to the Holy Spirit who resides within us, His Temple. 1 John 4:4: “You belong to _____ The one who is in you is _____ than the one who is in the world.”

5. The battle may have its rough moments, but we are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). The war has already been won by Jesus our Savior! (But we’re getting ahead of the Story of Salvation!)

© Glenda Canfield, March 2021.