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SPIRITUAL WARFARE - Fact or Fantasy?

There is a "new" concept of "Spiritual Warfare" bombarding the country. "Defeating Territorial Spirits" and "Battles against evil spiritual forces controlling our cities can be waged and won." (CHARISMA & THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, Apr. 1990). The new spiritual wave is Gnostic in nature and is the latest fantasy sweeping the Church and capturing the imagination of Christians everywhere.

Once again the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ is being substituted, only this time by a sensational "Star Wars" gospel, i.e., the GOOD FORCE versus the EVIL FORCE. It is as though the Church is playing "Dungeons and Dragons". This whole idea is reprehensible. As a result of this modern spiritual illusion, fantastic spiritual stories - some bizarre and others ridiculous - have been told as though they were gospel. What is fiction is being passed off as "gospel" truth.

This is aptly illustrated by Mike Bickle of Kansas City when he gives the following graphic picture at the Vineyard in Anaheim, CA in 1989: "Bob Jones has come to me several times after ministry. . . you may not believe this, but it's true, where. . . he's. . . went to bed at night and woke up the next morning with a big red streak across his face or a big cut, gash on his arm. He says, 'They got me last night'. He was at warfare in the realm of trances and visions and there was marks left on his body."

Scripture leaves no doubt that demonic powers in our environment are manifest through human agents such as false prophets, false apostles and "the children of disobedience". It is in this context that the war against the powers of darkness is waged by the Church. The claim that the Church's warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil is fought in the spirit realm in direct combat with spirit powers sounds like science fiction, a "Buck Rogers" novel or a "New Age" theosophical concept.

The whole idea shifts the responsibility and the blame for the sins of the flesh and the world from the individual to the demonic powers, which is pure Gnosticism. In Zoroastrianism, a Persian Gnostic religion, ". . . a good god rules the spiritual world and a bad god rules the physical realm. In such a philosophy, the problem of evil is solved by blaming everything that goes wrong on the bad god (the devil); the good god is seen as no more than a counterbalance. One is left with the impression that the two gods each possess equal power both in quality and quantity. Everything that is wrong in the world is the fault of the bad god. And it's up to the initiate or believer to make sure the good god wins." (THE AGONY OF DECEIT, Moody Press, pp.133).

We are being told that warfare against demonic powers in high places is the initial solution to all the ills and sins in the world and is the route for revival in our cities and churches. Roberts Liardon in his SPIRIT LIFE JOURNAL, July/August 1990 edition, claims in a word of prophesy that " governing apostolic centers shall you begin to see these centers are governmental places that will deal with the atmosphere above the territory that they are called to..." This is portraying a mystical form of warfare that also characterizes Greek mythology (human gods doing battle against spirit beings) and Shamanism (controlling or defeating the spirits as a solution to physical, worldly and spiritual problems).

Christians, think twice before you imaginatively leap into the unknown. Read the Bible for yourself. Don't fall victim to the new wave of sensational fantasy. These false prophets and apostles in the name of "spiritual warfare" are out to control your mind without regard for the written Word of God. Resist becoming involved in an abstract warfare that will hold your mind captive and make it a stronghold of Satan over your life. Restrict your spiritual thoughts to the Word of God and restrain your imagination from drifting into Satan's realm of mysticism.

“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ:” II Cor. 10:4, 5

Has this new "popularized" conflict become prevalent because of a book, PIERCING THE DARKNESS, that was written on the subject that was specifically called "fiction"? In an example given from the book: "Rafar ('the mighty, loathsome Prince of Babylon') screamed. Tal's ('Captain of the Host' of angels) blade had torn him open. The big red blade came down with a clang against Tal's, but that angelic sword was singing with a new resonance. It cut through the air in fiery arcs. . . Tal kept swinging, slashing, cutting, pushing Rafar back. The fiery eyes were oozing; the foam was bubbling out of the mouth and fizzing down the chest; the yellow breath had turned deep crimson."

"Then in one horrible rage-empowered swipe, the huge red sword came sizzling through the air. Tal went tumbling backward like a tossed rag toy. . his strength was gone."

"Through the vapor and darkness he could see Rafar's battered frame swaying like a big tree in the wind. The demon did not move. . . breaths were coming in long, slow wheezes. The nostrils spewed deep red clouds. . . those hate-filled eyes were like huge, glowing rubies."

The drooping, foaming jaws trembled open, and the words gargled through the tar and the froth, 'But...for...your praying saints! But for your saints!...'

"The big beast swayed forward. He let out one last hissing sigh and rumbled to the floor in a cloud of red."

"And it was quiet."

This is material that Hollywood has decided would be good material for a new box office hit to be released the summer of 1992. The producer says that he sees it as a "highly specialized technological sight and sound thriller." It is entertaining and does give an allegorical message just as PILGRIM'S PROGRESS was an inspiring allegory for Christian living. However, it is not to be taken literally, as direction for our prayer life or our Christian walk.

Unfortunately, we have those who are using this concept as a new method of "claiming" territory for Christ. Overnight, the words of Jesus, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" are not enough. We have to have some added excitement. Before we go do the words of Jesus, we must enter into warfare and bind the demons that are controlling the city. Rick Joyner says we must become "a militant church starting to go after the 'gates of hell' (doorways or openings that the enemy is using) and bringing them down with weapons that are not carnal but more powerful than the biggest nuclear device."

John Dawson is quoted in CHARISMA, "If we desire to intercede more effectively, we must know what specific demon forces we are dealing with. The key to obtaining that knowledge is the Spirit-given ability to discern the spiritual forces at work."

Tales are coming back of wonders that happen once this is done. The same night after a group of leaders prayed to break the stronghold of deception over Washington D.C., Mayor Marion Barry was caught in a drug bust - and thus another stronghold began to unravel. Stories abound that whereas before when the "warriors" entered the city, everything went wrong, but once they went into "warfare", bound the demons, on entering the city they experienced revival. Larry Lea claims that at his church while praying, "I sensed in my spirit a huge presence beside me. The Lord allowed me to discern that it was a demonic spirit which ruled over that region of the country clothed in my armor I stepped toward him at that point he backed off and disappeared." After that his church began to experience massive growth and revival.

Why is the Church in America open for everything that is new and sensational? Warfare choruses are being churned out, military slogans are being used and conferences called with militant overtones. Some evangelists are even laying hands on people to receive a "warring" tongue which I am told sounds something like a "machine gun" when spoken. Recently, a Baptist pastor in Kansas City stood up in his pulpit with a gun in a holster to prove his militancy. In a recent CHARISMA there was a frightening article on teaching small children to become involved in the "warfare". So obviously the mindset of even the very young is being set in a militant mold.

Demons are being given identities. Frances Frangipane in THE THREE BATTLEFIELDS says, "Intercessors and warfare captains take note: there is a demon

whose purpose is to lure one's mind into hell. Its name is "Wrong Focus". . . the ultimate goal of this demon is to produce mental illness in saints who move in deliverance." Rick Joyner in THE MORNING STAR focuses on the same thought: "There are principalities and powers committed to the thwarting of God's purposes, but there is a realm of darkness with even greater authority which are called 'world rulers'. One of these, which is actually a basis of authority for the spirit of death, is named 'Racism'." According to the COR (Coalition on Revival) National NEWSLETTER, ". . . a local church identifies a city block that needs help and then proceeds to pray, cast out demons and clean up the problems in that area." This seems to be part of the agenda to penetrate the urban areas of a city. (Could this have political overtones?)

I have no doubts about the sincerity of well-meaning Christians who are teaching on these lines. However, something is amiss. Why is the church trying to get into a realm where she does not belong? If this state of affairs continues, there will be madness on an unprecedented scale encouraged by authority figures in the Church.

In the 50's, A.A. Allen made records of demons speaking. As young children we would shut the doors, turn off the lights and listen to these vile sounds of the nether regions. The demons on the record would cough, choke and scream in blood-curdling tones. To a child's mind, this drama was so exciting. It was better than watching a Frankenstein horror show. Attending Allen's services, the demons would identify themselves, speak and indeed send the possessed into raging uncontrollable fits. The audience would be told to close their eyes, bow their heads or else on its way out, the demon might enter one unknowing soul. It was terrifying. Yet the crowds loved it. As a child, I would sit with my eyes tightly closed, terrified that if my eyes weren't tightly closed, one of those "horrible demons" would decide to "enter" me on his way out.

We are now in a new cycle of a repeat of so many things from the last Wave which started in 1948. What are people looking for in these sensationalized public encountering with evil spirits? A new thrill? Here we go again. Only this time, with all our "enlightenment", it is now "cosmic-level" warfare. Today, we are not dealing with just a demon or two, but different tiers of demonic activity. Lo and behold - even a hierarchy. We are so advanced that we can identify characteristics that are assigned to specific geographical locations and geopolitical institutions. We can even give them names according to their regions.

Spiritual warfare, pictured by Gnostic minds, has no foundation other than the imagination. The premise is both abstract and absurd. It hopelessly falls far short of the Scriptures. Spiritual thoughts of this nature lend itself to the prospect of going from the sublime to the ridiculous. It is quite apparent, that a "spiritual warfare" paranoia is breaking out in the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Unless it is contained it will sweep many into Kingdom/Dominion theology in a very short time. The following testimony, with reference to "Fighting Spiritual Strongholds" published in CHARISMA, is a typical example of the presumptuous pattern of thought that comes to those preoccupied with "spiritual warfare".

". . . Last year our prayer group, using a John Dawson tape on taking your city for God as a guideline, began interceding for our city and praying against controlling spirits (including greed, pride and a religious spirit).

On September 21, 1989, the most destructive hurricane to hit the United States struck Charleston. Two Christian women said that they saw visions of demons being blown away by the wind. Immediately following the hurricane, priorities changed for everyone. Neighbor helping neighbor was common. Denominational barriers came down. Churches held thanksgiving services.

Our city still has a long way to go but a foundation has been laid for the Lord to "rebuild the walls" and rebuild the lives of the people."

Our Commission

The Word of God doesn't tell us to go and research a region, find the spirits that bind and cast them out. This approach turns the attention to the warrior. HE must go into a place and "release" it.

According to the Word of God, the Preaching of the Gospel brings release. The church has been told to go into all the world and PREACH the GOSPEL to every creature. Jesus gave us this ministry. God is reaching out to the whole world through the preaching of the gospel. God is calling out of all peoples a people for His NAME. This is what the Church Age, or the Dispensation of Grace, is all about.

According to the Word, we are exhorted to pray for the government and those in authority - for all men and one another.. praying that the gospel will have free course.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour. Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:1-4

We are to evangelize the world. We can not save the world or Christianize the world. The Great Commission commands us to preach the Word to every creature. The Holy Spirit will do the saving, with God confirming His Word. All comes about by the preaching of the Word of God.

"And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the WORD with signs following. - Mark 16: 20

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." I Corinthians 1:21

People are set free by the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not by BINDING the devil. However, sometimes individuals do need deliverance from demons.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my WORD, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31, 32

The Word of God tells us simply, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7). When we obey the Word we live in victory! Why do we have to complicate the Gospel?

This Earth Will Pass Away

This world and this world system will pass away. This world will be the object of the wrath of the Lamb. In view of this fact, we must fix our gaze on the Kingdom of God that God is preparing. That Kingdom will never pass away. All of the "Redeeming the Land" will come to naught. This whole concept is being promoted by those who are bringing in a "new worldview".

No doubt we are living in the last days. With the rise of false prophets, false apostles and aberrant teachings, demonic activity is escalating - a sure sign of the end time. The Church is engaged in a fierce battle. However, the fight is not against "flesh and blood" or for the possession of a geographical location or the control of the political, secular and material world. It is for the salvation of precious souls by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, in spite of the powers that be. The strategy of the Church is not to save the "soul of a city" as some teach, but rather to set men and women free from the bondage of sin and the grip of Satan over their lives.

The Great Commission is to "preach the gospel to every creature", no matter what form of government or principality prevails at the time, be it the might of Rome, the hoards of hell or Satan himself. The political circumstances, however difficult or impossible, are immaterial. Jesus and His apostles proved this throughout their ministries. For the Church to fulfill the Great Commission is not contingent on who or what principality in heaven or on earth is in power at the time. The mission of the Church is to preach the gospel - come what may! This is the main thrust of the Church's warfare against Satan!!

The Church's Warfare is Fought in the Following Ways:

1. It is fought against the invisible powers of darkness

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high place.." Eph. 6:12.

This text is a graphic description of a warfare against the invisible enemies. According to Scripture, a literal war is being fought in the heavens between the host of God and the rebellious host of heaven. (Daniel 10:12-21 & Rev. 12:7-9). The Church, on the other hand, is also engaged in a warfare against the same cosmic enemies, except the battleground is on earth and the spirit enemies are invisible. Essentially, Satan's warfare is against God and His Word. His strategy on earth includes demons and fallen angels. His design is to defeat God's Word by controlling the world, the flesh and the minds of men. The Church's warfare is to trust in God and His Word, in spite of the enemy and adversity. The battle is fought on three fronts: (i) the world (the love of the world), (ii) the flesh (the lust of the flesh), and (iii) the devil (his deceptions, lies, temptations and abuses).

2. It is a warfare fought with the Word of God - the Sword of the Spirit. Not only does Ephesians 6:12 establish the nature of the warfare, but in no uncertain terms teaches how to defeat Satan without fighting an imaginative warfare in the heavenlies. For the Church to wrestle effectively against the enemies of the cross, she must put on the whole armor of God, i.e., the Word of God.

- a. "Having your loins girt about with truth."
- b. "Having on the breastplate of righteousness."
- c. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."
- d. "Above all taking the shield of faith."
- e. "Take the helmet of salvation."
- f. "Take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God."

The fullness of The Word of God is characterized by the above. It serves as both our defense and armor for conquest. Paul the Apostle, knowing the nature of spiritual warfare and the might of the weapons God has entrusted to His people says to the Church:

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Ephesians 6:13.

3. It is a warfare fought with an unshakable FAITH in the Word of God and is characterized by a good conscience.

“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, that thou. . mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience: . . (I Timothy 1:18,19).

Satan is to be resisted by FAITH.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking Whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the FAITH, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.- I Peter 5:8, 9.

Timothy was exhorted, "Fight the good fight of FAITH." (I Tim. 6:12).

4. It is fought through total consecration to the end.

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as good soldier of Jesus Christ.” II Tim. 2:3.

5. It is a warfare against the world

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” II Tim. 2:4.

6. It is a warfare against self.

“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” II Cor. 10:4, 5

The Biblical Warfare Strategy

1. Put on the whole armour of God. (Eph. 6:11-18)
2. Know Satan's devious. (II Cor. 2:11).
3. Give Satan no place. (Eph. 4:27; James 4:7).
4. Be sober and vigilant against Satan. (II Pet. 5:8-9).
5. Overcome Satan by the Word. (Matt. 4:1-11; I John 2:14).
6. Overcome Satan by the blood of Christ and testimony. (Rev. 12:11).
7. Overcome Satan in the name of Jesus Christ. (Eph. 2:20-22).
8. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. (Matt. 26:41).

The only way to fight and overcome Satan is to fight the "good fight" according to the Holy Scriptures. Fought in any other way, is boxing the air and will prove futile. Therefore, I pray that believers will stand firm on the Word of God, fight the "good fight" and faithfully fulfill the Church's mission in the spirit of the following Scripture:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” II Tim. 4:7, 8.

Evangelizing the world is the object and burden of the Church. We are strangers and pilgrims because this world is not our home. Although we are part of this world, our interest is not in establishing our presence. Ambition for authority and a presence in the world has and always will be the aspiration of selfish hearts. As believers in the promises of God, we are persuaded of better things. As members of "a royal priesthood", we have no heritage on earth or any claim thereto. As God's own people, we are looking for a city "whose builder and maker is God", and for a kingdom not of this world, whose King bears the Royal Insignia: **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”**. To those looking for HIS appearance, His name is: **JESUS CHRIST**.

Sincerely,

Jewel van der Merwe