

# Engaging in Spiritual Warfare

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Our struggle against Satan and his angels is often depicted in military terms. As soldiers of Christ we are to be devoted to Him and to His cause (2 Tim.2:3-4), and we are remain undistracted by the world. We are to "fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim.1:18-19). It is for the souls of men that we fight, because "***the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving***" (2 Cor.4:4). Those blinded by Satan will remain lost unless they "***see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ***" (2 Cor.4:4). "***The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil***" (1 Jn.3:8).

There are no conscientious objectors in spiritual warfare. All are engaged whether they want to be or not (Rom.6:16). We are either servants of God or servants of Satan; there is nothing in between. Those who attempt to remain neutral are nothing but cowards, and if they continue in cowardice their fate has been determined. "***But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***" (Rev.21:8). Neutrality allows the enemy to have free course, and a soldier of Christ is not to yield for even an hour (Gal.2:4-5). Those who try to avoid issues, hoping they will just go away, are performing a great service for Satan. When men are indifferent Satan succeeds, and Christ is repulsed (Rev.3:15-16).

## Our Weapons are Limited by God

The battleground in which we wage war is in the arena of beliefs and ideas. Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 10:3-6 is revealing:

*"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive*

*to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."*

Notice two things about this passage. First, false doctrines are depicted as fortresses "raised up against the knowledge of God." Satan's power is in his ability to deceive (2 Jn. 7). To succeed Satan merely needs for us to believe a lie. Some seem to think that sin occurs only when ideas become actions. Not so! Simply believing the wrong thing will cause us to lose our soul. Paul was "destroying speculations" and "taking every thought captive." In matters of doctrine we are not allowed to believe what we wish.

Second, Paul states that we are not to "war according to the flesh." This is more than a simple prohibition against physical warfare; it is a prohibition against carnal tactics. The word "flesh" (*sarx, sarkikos*) has a variety of meanings, which must be determined in the context. It can refer to the human body (Rom.2:28). It can refer to human judgment (1 Cor.1:26). It can be used in the sense of humanity (Rom. 3:20). But it can also refer to ungodly, sinful desires and actions (Gal.5:16-24). In this sense, flesh refers to what we do and think. We can have a fleshly (carnal) mind.

Some brethren, believing they have the truth on their side, resort to carnal tactics in their defense. In doing so they violate the command to "not war according to the flesh." God has limited us in how we may defend the truth:

*"Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word*

of God." (Eph.6:10-17)

Our strength and armor come from the Lord, we cannot choose weapons of our own devising. The only offensive weapon listed is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." It is the correct usage of God's word that will destroy the efforts of Satan. We see this in Matt. 4:1-11 when Jesus encountered Satan. In His responses He used the word of God demonstrating it's power (Heb. 4:12).

### **Satan's Tactics**

Does this mean that Satan uses weapons that are not at our disposal? Yes! His servants use trickery, sophistry, and every kind of deceit (Rom.16:17-18; Eph.5:6). A soldier of Christ may not: "**For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit**" (1 Thess. 2:3). Though we may not use Satan's weapons, we are to be informed about them (2 Cor.2:11). Below is a short list of some of the devil's most successful tricks.

**1) Attack the person rather than the argument (*ad hominem*).** By shifting the focus away from the actual issue to some weakness (or supposed weakness) in the one making the argument, the false teacher can put his opponent on the defensive. If he's successful in doing this, he won't have to answer the argument.

**2) Intentionally misrepresenting an argument (and the one making the argument) in order to make it easier to answer (*straw man*).** This can be done by re-defining words or phrases (equivocation), or taking statements out of context. False teachers do this with the Scriptures and with the words of those doing the correcting. Again, if successful, he won't feel obligated to respond.

**3) Shifting the issue (*red herring*).** The false teacher simply changes the topic and never deals with the arguments before him. Oftentimes he'll speak of how "mean-spirited" and "unkind" his opponent is for questioning his beliefs. There are too many who want to teach whatever they like without being called into question.

**4) Appeal to false authority (*ad verecundiam*).** Jesus has all authority in religion (Matt.28:18), and it is to the word of God that we are to appeal. This trick replaces the word of God with the words of

men. Oftentimes it is a well-respected preacher or commentator that is quoted as authoritative. (There is nothing wrong in quoting men who state something particularly well. The sin is in doing away with God's word as our final authority.) Again the Scriptures are our final authority. Those who find no authority in the Scriptures must turn to other sources.

**5) Appeal to tradition.** In other words, "We've always done it like this" (See Mark 7:13).

### **Conclusion**

Let us not be fooled by the tricks of the devil and his servants, and, certainly, let us never use them. Those who attempt to justify themselves will find Satan's devices very appealing. But if we are truly interested in magnifying the truth, we will focus our attention on the word of God and on the issues before us.