

BEING EFFECTIVE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Ephesians 6:11

This paper on spiritual warfare is not comprehensive. It lays down basic principles on the topic and provides a guide for further study of God's Word, which should be our primary text on these matters.

DEFINITION: "Utilizing all of God's resources to do battle with the enemies of His kingdom." (In this paper, "God" refers to the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit). "Enemies" include external and internal evil forces.

Ephesians 6:10-18 is the major Scripture passage dealing with this issue. Yet it is set in the context of the whole book. All of Ephesians is a powerful, God-given handbook on spiritual warfare, just as is the whole Bible. It is not restricted to casting out demons and delivering people from satanic oppression. Every thought, word, deed, attitude, and feeling occurs in the spiritual battlefield. Spiritual warfare begins in the heart, and is waged in all of life.

Let's walk through Ephesians and other Scriptures very briefly to see the broader battlefield from God's perspective.

God's Provision for Spiritual Warfare

In Ephesians 1:3 the Holy Spirit says that God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." These "blessings" are His provision for us, not just to enjoy life in Him, but to do battle. Let's look at some of these provisions.

1. Who God is.

God's essential nature—His identity, character and attributes—is our sure foundation for effective spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:10

says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in His mighty power." He is the only one in the universe capable of enabling us to be victorious.

In Ephesians He is revealed as "God our Father," "God and Father of all, who is over all," "the glorious Father." Jesus is described as "the Head," "our peace," and "head of the church."

His attributes available to us for spiritual warfare include: "His glorious grace, which He has freely given us," "the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding," and "His incomparably great power for us who believe." Ephesians also speaks of His glory, His mighty strength, the incomparable riches of His grace, His kindness, His love for us, His manifold wisdom, His glorious riches, and His mighty power.

For greater insight into who God is, study the Word. You'll find hundreds of descriptions of God's identity, character and attributes. As our Father, all of who He is becomes ours as we live for His glory. The Psalms demonstrate this well, e.g., Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." See 18:1-3.

2. Who we are in Christ.

To effectively do battle we must have a clear, conscious awareness of who we truly are because we are in Christ. Here are some descriptions of who we are from this epistle:

Regarding our identity, we are described as saints, His sons, God's possession, His body, God's workmanship, fellow citizens with God's people, members of God's household, a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit, heirs, dearly loved children of God, God's holy people, light in the Lord, and children of light.

Ephesians also describes our position in Christ: we have redemption through His blood, we were chosen and predestined, included in Christ, marked in him with a seal—the Holy Spirit, called to hope, saved by grace, raised with Christ, seated with him in the heavenly realms, created in Christ to do good works, brought near through His blood, able to approach God with freedom and confidence, and loved by Christ.

Conduct your own study of God's Word to complete your understanding of who we are in Christ, and how we are protected from the evil one because of who we are.

3. God's mighty works on our behalf.

As 2 Chronicles 20:15 says, "the battle is not yours, but God's." We go out against the enemy, but it is our mighty God who does battle for us. His battle on our behalf includes much more than direct warfare. It includes all His mighty works on our behalf, which enable us to live effective lives for Him.

Here are a few descriptions of God's acts on our behalf from Ephesians: He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ. He freely gave us His glorious grace, in fact He lavished it on us with all wisdom and understanding. He has given us His incomparably great power, the same mighty strength which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. He raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms.

Study the rest of Scripture to learn more about God's mighty works for us, so that we might be equipped for spiritual warfare.

4. Our weapons for spiritual warfare.

The Lord has graciously provided us with ample weapons and armor for being effective in doing battle with evil forces. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Ephesians 16:10-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8 describe our armor, provided for us by God. Study these passages to learn more about our weapons. Our defensive armor includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 faith and love are described as our breastplate. Our offensive weapons include the Word of God and prayer. With these weapons we can "take our stand" and "stand our ground" against the devil.

Strategies for Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare primarily involves living moment by moment with an acute awareness that we face relentless enemies who are waging war against us. "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15,16).

I believe Satan's primary method of warfare is to subtly try to destroy our relationship with God. We are to constantly take our stand "against the devil's schemes," the one who seeks to "outwit us" (Ephesians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 1:11). We do this by applying God's resources to constantly live out James 4:7,8: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands...purify your hearts..."

1. Put on the full armor of God.

Our armor is described above. We are to consciously take up these weapons moment by moment, not just when we are aware of “doing spiritual warfare,” because the battle continually rages. In Ephesians 6 we are commanded twice to “put on the full armor of God” so that we can be victorious against the onslaught of evil which faces us daily.

2. Live in Submission to God.

Submitting to God in every part of life is the primary battlefield of spiritual warfare. Remember that living lives for Christ in submission to God is spiritual warfare. God almost always talks about living life in relationships—to Him, ourselves, others, and the world. Let’s look at a few examples from Ephesians on how we are to live our lives in these three relationships, as a basis for further study and application.

a. Live in right relationship to God. In Ephesians He tells us to “live a life worthy of the calling” we have received. We are to “be imitators of God, as dearly loved children,” to “find out what pleases the Lord,” not to “be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” We must “be filled with the Spirit,” “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power,” and “pray in the Spirit on all occasions.”

b. Live in right relationship to ourselves. We are to internalize all we are in Christ, and appreciate all he has done for us. Let us come to understand at the deepest level of our being that we were made alive, saved, raised up with Christ in the heavenly realms, and that we are His workmanship.

This motivates us to live without “even a hint

of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Since we are “light in the Lord,” we can “live as children of light.” We are to deal with our anger quickly, and not “give the devil a foothold.” We must put off our old self, be made new in the attitude of our minds, and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

c. Live in right relationship to others. Ephesians provides many instructions on how we are to live in relationship to other people. Here are just a few:

- All people. We are to “live a life of love,” to be “humble and gentle ... patient,” to avoid stealing, to share with those in need. We must “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

- Fellow believers. Of course the commands on how to relate to all people apply to fellow believers. In addition, we are to “speak truthfully to our neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” We must speak “only what is helpful for building others up,” and to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave us.” Let us “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” “bearing with one another in love.”

- Our immediate family. Ephesians 5:22-6:4 lays down specific commands for relationships within the family.

- Unbelievers. We must not “be partners with” unbelievers who are disobedient to God. We must not “live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.”

d. Live in right relationship to the world. This includes the world as an evil system, and the natural, material world, which is also under

Satan's influence. God commands us to "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." He also says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

3. Resist the Devil.

This aspect of spiritual warfare includes living in submission to God. Our primary method for resisting the devil is to "say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:12). Then we are able to engage our enemy and all of his forces. Let's look at a few relevant issues in directly resisting the devil.

Before we can confidently do battle, we must clearly understand our enemy. Ephesians 6 clearly identifies our enemy and his kingdom: "the devil... the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms . . . the evil one." God promises victory over him. Just as literal warfare brings suffering, we must be aware that we may experience suffering as we resist the devil. 1 Peter 5:10 speaks of suffering while resisting the devil.

4. Specific Steps in Spiritual Warfare.

Following are some specific biblical strategies for resisting the devil. We need to keep these in mind as we do battle with him on a moment-by-moment basis.

a. Keep the evil one out of our lives by obedience to God, and especially by avoiding those internal enemies which open us up to his influence. These include the following: Unbelief (Luke 22:31,32). Immorality (1 Corinthians 5:4,5). Resentment—refusing to deal with our anger through forgiveness (Ephesians 4:26,27, 2 Corinthians 2:10,11).

Deceit—lying to God, self and others (Acts 5:1-11). Pride (1 Timothy 3:6,7, 1 John 2:16). Evil thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5). Love of the world (1 John 2:15). Lust (1 Peter 2:11, 1 John 2:15). Greed—love of money and material things (1 Timothy 6:9,10).

b. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Therefore we must "be self-controlled and alert ... resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8,9). Let's consider these four commands for effective warfare.

- Be self-controlled. This means to be well-balanced, to exercise self-control, to be sober. It implies being free from every form of mental and spiritual "drunkenness," from excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc. Let's regularly examine our lives to see if we have this kind of spiritual balance. Do we have any of the above patterns of excess which lower our defenses to Satan's influence?
- Be alert. We must never be off our guard in this battle, but be vigilant in our awareness that our enemy stands ready to attack. Do we awake each morning with the attitude of a soldier ready for battle, consciously aware that to defeat Satan requires constant readiness? Let us build a habit pattern of turning to our Lord when we first awake, putting on our armor, and reminding ourselves that in Christ we go out to war.
- Resist the devil. Being alert and ready, we can recognize his attacks immediately, and consciously take our stand against him. We resist him by refusing to give in to whatever evil confronts us at the moment. See above references to resisting the devil for ideas.
- Stand firm in the faith. Above all, Satan wants to punch holes in our faith-shield. As we battle him, we must be steadfast, with a flint-like resolution in our belief in God. It helps to

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actively remember and claim His Word to reinforce our faith when we're aware of Satan's attacks.

c. Realize that one of his favorite attacks is to accuse us. In 1 Peter 5:8 the "adversary" means "accuser," and "devil" actually means "slanderer." He is the "accuser of our brothers" (Rev. 12:10). When we feel condemned, let us consider if the accuser and slanderer is at work, and claim Romans 8:1: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." An especially powerful scheme of the devil is to entrap us in legalism; to convince us that we cannot be in right standing with God unless we follow the rules defined by our Christian subculture. Colossians 2:8-23 portrays this danger very clearly.

d. Help others and let yourself be helped. God never intended for us to wage spiritual warfare alone. Ephesians 4:11-16 describes the essential part each believer must play in building one another up. Scripture emphasizes this over and over. "But encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13). Other key passages include Galatians 6:1,2, Ephesians 6:18-20, Luke 22:31,32, Ecc. 4:9-12 and 1 Thessalonians 3:2-5.

e. When aware of direct temptation, speak God's Word directly to the evil one, as Christ did in His time of temptation (Matt. 4, Luke 4). We need as much Scripture as possible hidden in our hearts, so the Holy Spirit may use it as a sword as we speak it aloud when in battle. Memorize favorite "battle passages" to boldly use in the particular spiritual struggles you face at this time in your life. For example, if you are battling lust, learn Romans 13:14. Then, when temptation strikes, personalize and speak it out: "I clothe myself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and will not gratify the desires of my evil nature."

f. If confronted by obvious, overt demonic activity in others we have authority to command them in the name of Jesus to leave, assuming that we are His and are in right relationship to him. See Luke 10:17-20, Acts 16:16-18.

g. Bathe all our activity in prayer. Prayer is our direct communication link with our Battle Commander. At the end of the Ephesians 6 passage on spiritual warfare God says, "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." One commentator says, "The different parts of the armor have been described, and in effect the apostle would say 'each piece put on with prayer,' and then continue still in all prayer and supplication." Paul goes on to request prayer for himself, recognizing his own need for the prayers of others in his battle. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 God commands us to "Pray continually." But we must beware of misusing prayer by using it in a ritualistic way, or seeing it as a magic means of obtaining God's power against evil forces.

Some of God's Promises Regarding Spiritual Warfare

There are two kinds of promises in the Word on spiritual warfare for the believer: unconditional promises (based solely on God's grace), and conditional promises (based not only on God's grace, but on our doing our part). Here are some. Study His Word to find more.

1. Unconditional Promises

a. Through God's mighty power Christ is seated in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. God has placed all things under His feet and appointed him as head over everything for us, the church (Ephesians 1:19-21).

b. He has disarmed the powers and authorities, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

c. In Christ we have overcome the evil one (1 John 2:13,14, 4:4).

d. The Son of God appeared to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8).

e. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

f. Everyone born of God has overcome the world (1 John 5:4).

g. Even though the whole world is under the control of the evil one, Christ keeps us safe, and the evil one cannot harm us (1 John 5:18,19).

h. The Lord is faithful; He will strengthen and protect us from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3).

i. Demons cannot separate us from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:38).

j. When we suffer in our struggle against the devil, God himself restores us and makes us strong, firm and steadfast (1 Peter 5:8-10).

2. Conditional Promises.

a. The devil will flee from us if we resist him and submit to God (James 4:7).

b. We can take our stand against the devil's schemes if we put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11,13).

c. Not one flaming arrow of the evil one can pierce the shield of faith if we take it up against him (Ephesians 6:16).

d. In our struggle against sin we will not grow weary and lose heart if we fix our eyes on Jesus and steadfastly consider Him (Hebrews 12:2-4).

Conclusion

We have power and authority through Jesus Christ to confidently engage in spiritual warfare, without fear of evil powers. However, we are to be watchful, walk rightly, shun all forms of evil, and put on all of God's weaponry in order to do battle with our enemies. Spiritual warfare is not a mysterious "thing" we do only if we encounter the obvious presence of evil spirits. It is a moment-by-moment process of living according to God's Word, in His power, confidently facing an enemy already defeated by the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.