

deeper

word faith life

^PSeason 5

Healing

Angels

The Devil and Demons

Strongholds and Spiritual Warfare

Acknowledgements:

Louis Berkhof

Rodman Williams



Episode 8 – Strongholds and Spiritual Warfare

There are two primary errors when it comes to spiritual warfare, an over-emphasis and an under-emphasis. Some blame every sin, every conflict, and every problem on demons that need to be cast out. Others completely ignore the spiritual realm and the fact that the Bible tells us our battle is against spiritual powers. The key to successful spiritual warfare is finding the biblical balance. Jesus sometimes cast demons out of people; other times He healed people with no mention of the demonic. Paul the apostle instructs Christians to wage war against the sin in themselves (Romans 6) and warns us to oppose the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

What is Spiritual Warfare?

Ephesians 6:10-12 NIV

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armour 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.”

Paul continues in Ephesians 6:13–18 to give a description of the spiritual armour God gives us.

We are to stand firm with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and by praying in the Spirit.

What do these pieces of spiritual armour represent in spiritual warfare? We are to know the truth, believe the truth, and speak the truth. We are to rest in the fact that we are declared righteous because of Christ's sacrifice for us. We are to proclaim the gospel no matter how much resistance we face. We are not to waver in our faith, trusting God's promises no matter how strongly we are opposed. Our ultimate defence is the assurance we have of our salvation, an assurance that no spiritual force can take away. Our offensive weapon is the Word of God, not our own opinions and feelings. We are to pray in the power and will of the Holy Spirit.

Successful Spiritual Warfare

Fighting the right battles in the right arena with the right weapons under the right authority will cause us to be successful. We rely on God's power, not our own. We put on the whole armour of God. We draw on the power of the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. We pray with perseverance, making our appeal to God. We preach the gospel of truth, making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). We stand firm (Ephesians 6:13–14); we submit to God; we resist the devil's work (James 4:7), knowing that the Lord is our protector.

Psalm 62:2 NIV

“Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.”

We can only have His protection when we are under His authority and wage our spiritual warfare in the arena designated to us. If we step outside of this we can find ourselves in water that is too deep for us. Our arena is in twofold: our own lives, and our world. It is in fact, wherever the gospel is to be preached.

Mankind has been given authority by God to rule over His creation here on earth.

Genesis 1:27-28 NIV

“So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Jesus has given His church authority to make disciples here on earth.



Matthew 28:18-20 NIV

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

At the fall, mankind relinquished his authority to the enemy. Through Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension He reversed the effects of the fall and will one day bring about a new heaven and a new earth. Satan is still allowed to be in control here on this earth, but not for long. By making disciples we play our role in enforcing His victory over evil and releasing the captives; populating the new heaven and earth.

Isaiah 61:1 NIV

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

This is part of our warfare and it is the arena we have been authorised by Jesus to occupy.

The Dangers in Spiritual Warfare

We do need to proceed with caution because we are in a real battle. This is not some weird hobby for those who like praying a lot. The name of Jesus is not a magic incantation that causes demons to flee from before us. Sceva’s seven sons are an example of what can happen when people presume an authority they have not been given. (Acts 19:13–16) Even Michael the archangel did not rebuke Satan in his own power but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9) When we start talking to the devil, we run the risk of being led astray as Eve was. Our focus should be on God, not demons; we pray to and speak to Him, not them.

“Warfare prayer” is a type of prayer popular with the charismatic church movements of the early 1980’s . It focuses on using prayer as a weapon to do battle with the spiritual forces of evil, especially in regard to one’s daily life, habits, and struggles. Prayers prayed for the purpose of waging war against an unseen, spiritual enemy who’s goal is to derail our lives and ministries. Not to make us unhappy by thwarting our dreams and desires, which was where the focus ended up being.

There is no doubt that spiritual warfare is real, and we have an enemy in Satan and his demons (Ephesians 6:12). Prayer is instructed by Paul in the context of putting on the armour of God (Ephesians 6:18). Some things recommended by “warfare prayer” adherents are useful. But many of the “warfare prayer” techniques are unbiblical, and we should be careful not to be led astray by them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave two general guidelines on prayer: pray secretly instead of to be seen by other people and don’t repeat empty phrases. (Matthew 6:5–8) Then, He taught His disciples to pray like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”. (Matthew 6:9–13) Jesus stressed the importance of forgiveness, saying that those who are forgiving will be forgiven (Matthew 6:14–15).

“Warfare prayer” commonly encourages a “take control” attitude, where prayer warriors are told to be bold, decisive, and faithful in prayer. There is nothing wrong with praying boldly and faithfully, as long as we remember who is in charge, and it’s not us. Common “warfare prayers” include many “I” statements such as “I declare,” “I decree,” “I bind,” “I overrule,” “I smash,” “I rebuke,” etc. The pray-er is the acting agent, and there is a



danger of praying “My will be done” rather than “Thy will be done.”

Some warfare prayers even speak directly to Satan. This is totally unbiblical and we would do well to steer clear of this. Our prayers are to be directed to God and to Him alone. The Bible never tells us to rebuke Satan or to speak to him or his demons in any way. The rebuking of Satan is done by the Lord, not us. “Even the archangel Michael . . . did not himself dare to condemn [Satan] for slander but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 1:9) The biblical instruction is to submit to God and resist the devil, (James 4:7) not to demand things of Satan.

When warfare prayer gurus exhort believers to “command” things to happen in their lives or to aggressively pray for a dream or desire that may or may not be God’s will, this is not faith, it is a presumptuous recipe for discouragement. Praying in the midst of our spiritual warfare is necessary, but “warfare prayer” does not mean praying harder, praying more decisively, or assuming some authority we do not have. It means praying according to Scripture, trusting in the power of God, and submitting our will to His.

There are some Christians who believe they have the authority to rebuke the devil. There is no biblical basis for such a belief. Satan, unlike God, is not omnipresent. He can only be in one place at a time, and the likelihood of him personally harassing individual Christians is small. Of course, he has legions of demons who do his bidding, and they are everywhere seeking to destroy our lives and ministries. We need to be aware of the reality of the presence of evil. As we endeavour to stand firm in our faith, we must realise that our enemies are not merely human ideas, but real spiritual forces that come from the powers of darkness.

Ephesians 6:12 NIV

“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.”

God has allowed Satan significant amounts of power and influence over the earth for now, but always within God’s sovereign control. The Bible tells us that Satan prowls around like a lion in search of prey, looking for victims to devour. (1 Peter 5:8) Satan is the power at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God (Ephesians 2:2). Anyone who is not under the control of the sovereign God is under the control of the devil. (Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4) Born-again Christians are no longer enslaved to Satan or to sin, (Romans 6:6-7) but this does not mean we are immune to the temptations that he puts before us.

The Bible does not give Christians the authority to rebuke the devil, but rather to resist him.

James 4:7 NIV

“submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Zechariah 3:2 tells us that it is the Lord who rebukes Satan. Even Michael, one of the most powerful of the angels, did not dare to accuse Satan, but rather said,

Jude 1:9 NIV

“The Lord rebuke you.”

In response to Satan’s attacks, as believers, we should appeal to Christ. Instead of focusing on defeating the devil, we should focus on following Jesus with the knowledge that He has already defeated the forces of evil. This is another example of the already but not yet of the Kingdom of God.

God has given us His full armour to stand against evil. (Ephesians 6:10-18) The most effective weapons we have against the devil are our faith, wisdom, and knowledge of God and His Word. Even Jesus, when tempted by Satan, answered him with Scripture. (Matthew 4:1-11) To gain victory in spiritual matters, we must maintain a clear



conscience and have control over our thoughts.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NIV

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Making disciples is one of the greatest weapons in spiritual warfare because it makes use of Jesus delegated authority to demolish arguments and pretensions.

Binding and loosing properly understood, will eliminate the dangerous extremes of "warfare prayer." This scripture has been badly used over the years and has caused much confusion in the Church.

Matthew 16:19 NIV

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

This is not to be understood as a Christian having the authority to dictate to heaven, or to bind and loose powerful spiritual forces, evil or good. This passage must remain in its proper context. Jesus is building His church upon the foundation of the revelation from heaven that He is the Son of God, and the delegated authority that He gives to His church to preach the gospel. It's actually about making disciples, which in itself, is a very powerful and effective means of spiritual warfare.

We must fight our fight in the correct arena, with the correct weapons, and under the correct authority if we want to be successful at spiritual warfare.

Memory Verse

Psalm 62:2 NIV

"Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken."

