

Principles of Spiritual Warfare

The Enemy

Christians are in a continual state of warfare, whether or not they are aware of that fact. We have many, many enemies. The **world system** is set in opposition to us. We are told in 1 John 2:15,16, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." This world system is not just neutral towards genuine Christianity-it vehemently hates all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Master told His disciples in John 15:19, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Sometimes the world seems to be friendly, or at least at peace, with the followers of Jesus, but the enmity is always there. The enemy is always looking for Christians to show some sign of weakness or to let their guard down. When this happens, the enemy strikes! We should not be needlessly obnoxious, but if we manifest true Christianity in our daily lives, we will not be on friendly terms with this world system. The great Apostle Paul displayed the proper attitude toward this present evil world when he said in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Another enemy, who has a malignant hatred for Jesus Christ and His followers, is **Satan**. He is the one who directs this evil world system against the cause of Christ. The very name, Satan, means "Adversary." Another of his names is "Devil," which means "an accuser, a slanderer." Peter says of him in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..." This is not a very pretty or safe picture is it? How would you like to be out in the wilderness and suddenly confronted with a hungry lion who wanted to eat you? If you lived in territory where lions were known to roam, wouldn't you be very alert and make sure you always carried a weapon? Christians cannot be lackadaisical or indifferent about the Devil. They must be **determined** and **prepared** to resist him. A half-hearted effort will not do. Speaking of this enemy of our souls, James said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Speaking of this great enemy Peter said, "Whom resist stedfast in the faith..." This malignant foe is viciously trying to destroy every true church, every Christian marriage and every individual Christian life. If you are a Christian, he hates you and is after you! He is very angry. As John warned us in Revelation 12:12, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

These two enemies that we have named are very dangerous, but perhaps the most formidable foe that we face is **our own fleshly nature!** The fallen nature is not eradicated when we are born from above. We retain this nature, which is sometimes called the "old man," the "flesh," and other names. Sometimes we discount just how vile and dangerous this fallen nature is. Jeremiah was referring to the old man when he said in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Paul, in referring to the old man, said in Romans 7:18 "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing..." He knew that the flesh was an enemy to the new nature which was received in the new birth. He knew that he could not turn his back on his flesh or it

would destroy his usefulness in the service of the Lord. He made diligent efforts to subdue this old nature and to resist the wicked desires that came from it. He told of this continual battle in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

We must never forget that as long as we are in this present state of existence we will have to contend with these three potent enemies. As we are engaged in this struggle we must strive to become more and more proficient in spiritual combat. There are some principles that we must adhere to if we are to be successful in our struggle.

Leadership

I have been doing a good deal of reading in secular history. Much of this history has involved warfare. It has become very apparent that one of the most vital components of military victory is that of good leadership. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of good leadership in warfare. Many times in history a larger army which had poor leadership has been defeated by a much smaller army which followed skilled leaders. It is also true that the character of good leaders causes their troops to have great confidence in them and to be willing to make great sacrifices for the cause. In the history of our own nation, it was the character of George Washington which held the revolutionary army together. In the war between the North and the South, the vastly stronger forces of the North were thwarted for several years by the better-led Southern troops, who were led by such men as Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. It is just about impossible to achieve victory without excellent leadership.

In our combat against the enemies of our souls we need proficient leadership by our pastors. I believe that there is a critical need for our pastors to have the wisdom to properly lead the flocks who are in their care. A man may be a good preacher but a poor leader. A good leader is a man who thinks about the future and has some spiritual objectives in mind for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has placed him as overseer. As Solomon said in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." In Hebrews 13:17 we read concerning our pastors, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls..." The word translated "rule" here is an interesting word. It means "to lead; to go before." A good pastor is a good leader. When people have a good pastor they should cooperate with him closely and should joyfully and thankfully follow his leadership. He has a right to insist they follow him as long as he is following Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." A good leader will not lead as an autocrat; he will lead by example. The proper balance is shown in 1 Peter 5:2,3, where the apostle says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."

A necessary quality of a good leader is the ability to recognize one's limitations. Some leaders try to perform in situations for which they are totally unqualified. An example in secular history is General Burnside, who led the Northern troops at the battle of Fredericksburg. Many, many men were needlessly killed because of his incompetent leadership. He might have made a good captain or major, but he was not a good general. Sometimes in our churches we see men who try to perform in capacities for which they are totally unqualified. How sad and often destructive it is to see a man who is obviously not called to preach to somehow get ordained and try to fill a role for which he is not fit. It is wise for us to prayerfully ask God to show us what our gifts and talents are and to put forth our efforts where they can truly be helpful. In 1 Corinthians 7:20 Paul very wisely said to, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called."

Not only do we need good pastoral leadership in our spiritual battles, we need for **husbands** and **fathers** to be good leaders in their homes. It is not right for a man to turn over the spiritual leadership in the home to his wife. He may have a very spiritual-minded wife, and he should surely seek her counsel, but God has called him to be the head of the household and to lead his wife and family into godly pursuits. The Devil knows that a father who is a good leader is a real threat to the kingdom of darkness. That is why there is such a vicious assault on the proper role of husbands and fathers in the Western world today. A man absolutely must properly lead his family if he is to successfully exercise a position of leadership in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul made this plain when, speaking of pastoral qualifications, he said in 1 Timothy 3:4,5, "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)"

Let us pray diligently that God will bless our pastors, husbands, and fathers to be good leaders as they lead us in our spiritual warfare. I exhort those who are in positions of leadership to diligently seek the face of God and beg Him to enable you to be a better leader. There is much at stake here.

Unity

Another condition of successful warfare, which is closely intertwined with that of leadership, is the ability of those who are engaged in combat to be able to work together in the very closest of cooperation. A great mass of men who do not work in close unity can be defeated by a much smaller number who are trained to work together. There was a graphic example of this in 62 A. D. Queen Boadicea of a British tribe had an army of over 200,000 Britons. These men were larger and stronger than their rivals, the Romans. They were highly motivated because they were fighting for their homeland against the Roman invaders. They outnumbered the Romans by almost ten to one. However, the Britons did not know how to fight together. They just charged the Romans with impetuosity and bravery. The Romans fought as a unit. They turned as one man to face the enemy on different fronts when they heard the trumpets blow certain signals. The result was that the much smaller Roman force completely destroyed the army of the Britons.

This unity was achieved by several factors. One was by following leadership. In an army, in a family, or in a church a certain recipe for disaster is when everyone does what he pleases without regard to

leadership. The book of Judges provides one of the most dismal pictures of chaos in the Bible. The reason is seen in Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." We live in an age when there is little respect for leadership and authority. This attitude sometimes infects our churches and our families. We must beg God to help us to humble ourselves and submit in a godly way to those who lead us. God has given ministerial gifts to the church. The purpose of these gifts is that "we all come in the **unity** of the faith..." According to Ephesians 4:16 a church that is properly led and who follows that leadership, functions like a well-coordinated body.

Another factor that achieved the unity spoken of above was **training**. Working together does not come about automatically. A family and a church must practice unity. People must be willing to spend time with each other. They must take the time to communicate. They must learn to forgive one another and to resolve differences in a Scriptural way. This takes time, effort, and much prayer. A disunited church or family is a very sad thing to see. On the other hand nothing is more effective and pleasant than a situation in which unity exists. The Psalmist was certainly right when he said, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" I call on all the pastors and fathers who read this to prayerfully rededicate your lives to achieve unity in the churches and homes where Christ has placed you.

How complete should this unity be? Paul, in speaking to the Christians at Rome, exhorted them "That ye may with **one mind** and **one mouth** glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:6.). The great Apostle thought this unity was worth working hard for. He exhorted the saints at Ephesus to be "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). If we will be unified and follow good leadership we can defeat all our enemies. This is God's way of victory.

Preparation

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that actual fighting is the only aspect of warfare. That is not true. Armies spend relatively little time in actual fighting. Before the battle ever begins much time has been spent in preparation. In most instances the army that has done the best preparing is victorious. Some of this preparation takes the place of planning. An army that marched off to battle with no idea of what it wanted to accomplish would not likely to be successful. Do you pastors know what your members need in order to fight the battles they are going through? What is the age composition of your congregation? Do you have older people with the specific needs that go with old age? Do you have young people who are being brainwashed by the world system? Have your people been equipped to defend the truth if they are confronted with error? What do you think will be going on in the church you pastor five years from now?

What about you fathers? Do you know what your children are being taught in school? Do you know who their friends are? Are you aware of the specific temptations that they face? Are you preparing them to face the future? Are you teaching them how to choose a future husband or wife? These kinds of questions could go on and on, and they are designed to show the imperative need of forethought and preparation in our various phases of Christian warfare. The wise man said thousands of years ago in

Proverbs 20:18, "Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war." We pastors need to have **war counsels** with our deacons and spiritual minded men and women. We husbands and fathers should hold these **counsels of war** with our wives. If we do not do so we will meet the enemy unprepared. We will come up short while we are in heat of combat when it will be too late to remedy the situation.

A parallel Scripture to the last one quoted is found in Proverbs 24:6, "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety." Often a pastor will try to be a lone wolf. Either through fear or pride he will not consult anyone when he faces difficulties. We all need godly counsel from time to time. Is there a father among our readers who is having a great deal of trouble with a son or daughter? Are you almost in despair? Pray that God will direct you to a godly couple who have raised a family and see if they can pray with you and give some good advice. Is there a pastor out there who is silently in anguish because there is a desperate situation in the church that threatens to almost destroy the body? Have you considered getting godly counsel from an older, experienced pastor who has passed this way before?

Laying Up in Store

Another essential form of preparation is anticipating needs and laying up those things with which to meet those needs. Napoleon said that an army travels on its stomach. No matter how brave men may be, they cannot fight if they are starving. Just the other night I read a letter from George Washington to Governor Clinton of New York. The letter was written during the winter of 1778 when the Continental Army was in winter quarters at Valley Forge. Washington told Clinton that the men had had no meat for several days and were in danger of starvation. Some of them were practically naked and exposed to the cruel winter. They were in danger of mutiny. If there had not been some measure of relief there would have been no army when spring arrived. Have you laid up food for your soul? You never know when you will be called to desperate combat. You may experience sickness. You may be called on to part with a dear loved one in death. Satan may suddenly assault you in a new way. Are you prepared? What is the food that you need to be laying in store? It is the word of God. Jesus Christ said in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Peter said that we should "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby..." Daily Bible reading, study, and meditation is the way to have spiritual food stored up for spiritual warfare. If you have become slack, fill up your empty bins. Fathers, do you have daily devotionals with your family? Are you preparing them? Pastors, are you feeding your flock like you should? Are you preaching to them doctrine, practice, and Christian experience? Are you preparing them for inevitable spiritual warfare?

We must also have our weapons ready. All the bravery and zeal in the world will not avail if we are without weapons or do not know how to use them. We have formidable enemies, but we also have powerful and effective weapons. Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians 10:3,4, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)..." What are some of these weapons? The apostle enumerates them in Ephesians 6:10ff. He speaks of the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, and prevailing prayer. Do you know where these weapons are in your life? Are you well stocked? Have you practiced and drilled with these weapons and know how to use them? Fathers, have you been the drillmasters and weapons

instructors you should have been to your wives and children? Pastors, I ask the same question of you concerning your flock? I just want to warn you. The enemy will attack. We do not always know when or where. He is always lurking in ambush. We must be alert, but we need not fear if we are prepared.

One thing that has impressed me in my secular reading is how young some of the combatants were. Many young men have performed great feats of valor on the battlefield. How did they do this? They were taught the art of warfare when they were mere boys. They daily practiced for hours with their weapons. May our young people be inspired to do that today. We need heroes and heroines of the faith, both young and old. John spoke of different age groups. He spoke of little children, fathers, and young men. He said in 1 John 2:14, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." These young men had prepared themselves. Are there any young men out there who are reading this?

Withstanding a Siege

Many times when the enemy invades a land the people are forced to flee to a fortified place and take refuge there. The enemy then surrounds the place, assaults it, and tries to induce it to surrender. Sometimes Satan invades us with a special viciousness. We have trouble in the home or in the church. We may have a lingering illness. We must then flee to the stronghold. Thank God, we have the perfect place of fortification. Solomon said in Proverbs 18:10, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The Name of Jehovah means all that He is and does. John Newton understood this almost two hundred years ago. He said:

Dear name, the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding place,
My never failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace.

Usually the enemy will attack us immediately after we enter the stronghold. We are usually successful in our resistance. We drive the invader back from the walls. We are euphoric with our victory and think that this is not so hard after all. The enemy may make several attempts to breach the walls, and we will probably be able to resist him.. Then the really hard part starts. He has not been able to enter the fort, so he settles down for a long siege. He completely surrounds our fort. Now he tries to either wear our patience down or starve us out. Some of the famous sieges in history have lasted for **months** or even for **years!** When Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D. to the Roman armies of Titus, the city had been under siege for a very long period of time.

It is sad to see a fortified place that has bravely withstood a siege for a long time to finally fall. I have seen this happen to young people who waited a long time for the right marriage companion. They have been very lonesome and eager to marry but have held out because they were waiting for the one that the Lord would provide. After awhile, I have seen some of them allow Satan to wear them down and rashly enter marriage with the wrong person. The results have been disastrous. I have seen other people bear up cheerfully under difficult trials for a very long time, to finally succumb to bitterness or despair. It is hard to undergo a siege of Satan and we must be prepared for it.

How do we prepare for a siege? We must have plenty of food and water stored up. Most of the time this is how the besiegers subdue their opponents—they starve them out. We must lay up stores by habitually being under the sound of the gospel, but daily Bible reading and prayer, by regular obedience to the commands of God, by fellowship with the saints. Not knowing when the enemy will invade our land, we must always be prepared.

We must also be aware that the enemy we are dealing with is treacherous. He is a deceiver and a liar. In my reading of history it has saddened me to read of brave people who held out for a long time, but were finally destroyed by lies and trickery. This happened again and again in the wars in the Netherlands. The Catholics were very treacherous. They would often besiege a city but could not take it because of the brave defense of the inhabitants. They would then either try to find a secret way into the city or they would realize how weary the inhabitants had become and would promise them that they could go free if they would only lay down their arms and surrender. Satan is looking for a secret way into your life. Is there some place where your "walls" are not strong? Is there the passageway of a secret sin in your life that the Devil may come in by some night and stab you in the back while you are sleeping?

Do not listen to the lies of the Devil. He is never at peace with you. He will try to get you to lay down your arms and will promise you peace, and that will sound so good to you. You are tired of the siege. You want life to get back to "normal." Do you know what will happen the moment you open the doors of your fortress and lay down your weapons? The enemy will slaughter you and your loved ones in cold blood, and he will laugh at your foolishness while he does so. Would it not have been much better to have resisted him to the end?

When we, as a church or as a family, are being besieged, we must realize that another tactic of the enemy is to get us to squabbling among ourselves. It is easy to pull apart when we are in unpleasant situations that last for a long time. I have known husbands and wives to divorce when one of their children died. The tragedy should have brought them closer together, but they let it drive them apart. This often happens when people undergo financial difficulties. I earlier made an allusion to the fall of Jerusalem. The Romans besieged this city for many months but could not take it. In the final analysis the inhabitants of Jerusalem defeated and destroyed themselves. There were several factions inside the walls. They had much food stored up. However some of the factions began to destroy some of the food supply to keep it out of the hand of rival factions. They "cut off their nose to spite their face." When we find ourselves under siege let us be on guard against a contentious spirit in our own hearts.

The good news is that we can **always** win when besieged by our spiritual enemies if we are properly prepared and if we conduct our defense in the Biblical way. There have even been instances in secular history when an invading army simply had to march away because they simply could not break down the defenses of the enemy. The Lord has promised us this kind of victory. He said in James 4:7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and **he will flee** from you." However, this resistance must not be halfhearted it must be with all our might. The Scripture also says in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..." Then, in the next verse, he says, "Whom resist steadfast in the faith..."

Be Good Soldiers

There is much military terminology in the Bible. There are many analogies between natural and spiritual warfare. It takes certain qualities and behaviors in people to make them good soldiers. Paul points out two of these important qualities in 2 Timothy. He exhorted in 2 Timothy 2:3 "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." What does it mean to endure hardness? Well, a soldier's life is not an easy one and, for the most part, it is not very exciting. Battle is exciting, but most of a soldier's life is not spent in battle. Much of it is spent in drilling, crawling in trenches, peeling potatoes, pitching and sleeping in tents in all kinds of weather. A soldier is often hungry, wet, cold, and bored.

It is the same way in our Christian lives. Being a father or a mother is not always a great deal of fun. Discipline and training of children is not always an exciting joy. Not even all of marriage is a lot of fun. I know very few women who really look forward to washing dishes and changing diapers. I know husbands and fathers who faithfully go to work even when they are sick and do not feel like getting out of bed. I know from experience that preaching is a joy if the Lord blesses with liberty, but not all of pastoring is a lot of fun. The point I am making is that we must endure hardness (and there will be a lot of it), if we are to be faithful soldiers of the cross of Jesus. There is no place for "summer patriots" or "sunshine soldiers" in the kingdom of God.

The other soldiery quality that Paul points out is in 2 Timothy 2:4, "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." This is the principle of **concentration**. A good soldier must put his entire efforts into being a soldier. What kind of national defense would we have if all our military personnel held down part time jobs? What would happen if the enemy suddenly attacked, but our defenders were sacking groceries at the time? What if our sentry had his mind on his other occupation and allowed the enemy to penetrate our lines? I am glad that my mother was **always** on the job of being a mother. One night at midnight she caught my brother and myself experimenting with smoking. Thank God she caught us. We just could seldom get into much real mischief because my dear mother was always on duty. Are you mothers who are reading this on duty? What about you fathers? What about you pastors? Do you know what is going on among your congregation? Are you concentrating your efforts?

A Good Intelligence Service

One often overlooked but vital ingredient in successful warfare is a good intelligence service. A successful commander must know what the enemy is up to. If he can manage to get a copy of the rival commander's plans, he is at a great advantage. If his intelligence department can keep a close watch on the enemy's movements, he will never be taken by surprise. Do we Christians have an intelligence service? We most certainly do. We find it in the Scriptures. We know, if we will constantly study the Bible, what our enemy is up to. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:11 "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." People who are in the intelligence service in warfare must be very alert and energetic. Their work is invaluable in its contribution to victory.

Morale

The final principle of successful warfare that we would like to consider is that of morale. If an army is assured of ultimate victory they can endure temporary setbacks and great hardships. The enemy knows how important this factor is and quite often engages in **propaganda** campaigns to discourage the

opponent. Satan will lie to us and tell us that we cannot hold out, that we cannot possibly win and should just give up now and accept terms of surrender. However, we should never listen to these lies. We true Christians are going to be ultimately greatly victorious in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has promised that He would never leave us nor forsake us. He has conquered all the enemies that we have or ever will be confronted with. What about the Devil? Look at what Scripture says about him in Revelation 20:10, "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

What about this world system? 1 John 2:17 says "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

What about our flesh? Romans 7:24,25 tells us "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We can endure much if we have **hope** of victory. One of the functions of hope is to give us **patience**. The Biblical concept of patience is that of **endurance**. Paul tells us in Romans 8:25 "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

Brothers and sisters, we should have the very highest degree of morale. "We are **more than conquerors** through him that loved us." This morale should give us stability and strength and renewed courage as we meet our defeated foes in combat. A great soldier from the distant past, who fought long and well, and finally laid down his life for the cause, left these encouraging and challenging words to motivate us on our way to victory: 1 Corinthians 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Zack M. Guess

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