

What Should We Know About Spiritual Warfare?

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: **the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.***
Ephesians 4:11, 12 NLT: (Emphasis added is mine).

This study is one of a five part series of teachings regarding the foundational work of the fivefold ministry as given in the Ephesians reference presented above. It is the work of the five-fold ministry, as executed by the various members of the body of **Jesus**, to build up the other believers into a complete maturity in **Christ**. Each of these ministries is related to a foundational area of study for the disciple. This fourth study will introduce the disciple to some important concepts and ideas that they will find helpful when considering the study of Spiritual Warfare as the portion of the five-fold ministry concerning evangelists and the message of truth that they bring to the disciple.

Jesus made no attempt to hide the nature of our warfare from the disciples. Right from the beginning of His ministry, he was quick to remind us that the Prince of Peace had not come to bring 'peace' with His first coming but rather, He came to bring a sword, Matthew 10:34. What did he mean by this provocative statement?

It is apparent that that Jesus meant that as believers, we would go through some sort of battle. We have a clue to the nature of this battle when Jesus says that the world will reject us, John 15:18, 19 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but **you are no longer part of the world.** I chose you to come out of the world, so **it hates you.***

Some believers think that we can live in a peaceful coexistence with the people of the world, but the truth is that we cannot. The world loves their own but they hate the people of **GOD**. They will show this hatred to anyone that steps forward to show their faith. Many people have avoided entering the fray by hiding their faith, but such a strategy is very risky. **Jesus** explains this situation in Luke 12:8, 9 NLT:

I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges Me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who denies Me here on earth will be denied before God's angels.

Living a life that does not demonstrate our faith may place us in an unfavorable position with the one that gave up so much for us. It is understandable to want to avoid conflict with our families, friends, co-workers and others. But this conflict will become unavoidable if challenged. You will then be forced to profess **Jesus** or to not confess Him.

I was able to witness this situation many times in my years of witnessing. I remember a particular time when it seemed like we ran into believer after believer while street witnessing. We became frustrated at first because we wanted to reach the lost, but then the **LORD** showed us that we were providing a very valuable service to these believers. We were total strangers going up to them and asking about their faith. They were in that position of having to confess or not to confess their faith. Some responded with a bold statement of faith but others were more timid about their response. We realized that we were forcing them to confront this issue of faith. As a result of these confessions, some of the people that were with the believers did learn of their faith, and it opened the door for the confessing believer to share their faith with them.

I believe that these experiences are the battlefield that **Jesus** was talking about. We might ask ourselves if we would be good soldiers of **Christ** and boldly show forth our light or would we hide our light under the basket, Matthew 5:14-16 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one **lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket**. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where **it gives light to everyone in the house**. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*

I can understand how intimidating it can be to stand firm against our family and friends. **Jesus** gave a realistic word regarding this situation Matthew 10:35, 36 NLT:

I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!

For most of us this will not be good news but it does help to explain why the people in our life do and will act in a hostile manner to us. The reason for their actions is that they do not understand what you do. It is only natural that when they see a loved one change dramatically and they do not understand why, they will naturally react in such a manner.

This scenario describes is the essence of our spiritual warfare. First we need to battle to maintain our own faith but then we are in an active battle to bring truth to those that we love and then to the community at large. We will first explore the larger battle and then come back to describe our personal battle. The reason that I am doing it this way is that when people realize the greater stakes involved, they will be more motivated to succeed in their personal battle.

Jesus has declared that the enemy will be those in our own family. This can be a shocking and disturbing thought but the good news is that **Jesus** had a plan for dealing with this situation. The even greater news is that what will work for your family will also work for those people outside your family. This battle begins with an understanding of how we are to deal with our enemies. **Jesus** gave us these basic instructions regarding our treatment of our enemies, Matthew 5:44-48 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*But I say, **love your enemies!** [Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you.] **Pray for those who persecute you!** In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are **to be perfect** (complete in loving attitude), even as your Father in heaven is perfect (complete in loving attitude).*

Let us examine this reference in greater detail. Our primary response to those that may be considered our enemy is to 'love' them. Loving our enemies is not a natural response but it is a response that reveals the very nature of **GOD**. The word love is translated from the Greek word *agapao*, which has the sense of caring about someone in a social sense by offering a welcome and hospitality.

Instead of resisting our enemies, we are to engage them in loving acts of kindness. This love is a reflection of the love that our **Father** had for us when we were resisting Him in our former lifestyle, Ephesians 2:4-6. These acts take two forms, one which is spiritual and one which is more temporal. The admonition to bless them refers to the spiritual acts and they consist of invoking **GOD's** sanctity on them. The act of blessing something or someone is to set them apart for **GOD's** purposes. Thus when we bless our enemy, we are opening a window whereby the **Spirit of GOD** may move upon them to fulfill **GOD's** purposes. Eventually this blessing may result in the person coming into the knowledge of the saving grace of our **LORD**.

The doing 'good' for them consists of the acts that affect this temporal world. The word good refers to acts that are not minimal but rather, they refer to acts that reflect the most that we can do. When **Jesus** gave us the Parable of the Good Samaritan, He was setting forth a pattern that we were to follow, Luke 10:29-37 NLT:

The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

A couple of points are helpful to emphasize here. The poor person that was attacked was a Jewish man and the two religious figures that passed him by were also Jewish. The reason for their ambivalence may have been that they did not want to become ceremonially 'unclean' by touching the wounded man, which would have required a cleansing ritual to be performed. We need to reflect in our own lives how many times we may have passed by a needy person because it wasn't convenient or we may not have felt safe. But the hero of the story was a despised Samaritan who was the enemy of the Jewish man.

And how did he respond? He immediately addressed the situation to aid to the wounded Jewish man, his enemy. Not only did He offer immediate assistance but he even took the man to an inn and paid for the time of his recovery. This is what it means to do the most that we can rather than the minimum or **GOD** forbid, doing nothing at all.

We are then admonished that if we only do good to those we like then what real good is that, for don't evil people do that. Then **Jesus** interjects a most salient point regarding the nature of **GOD**. **Jesus** refers to the **Father** as being 'perfect.' This word 'perfect' is translated from the Greek word *teleios*, which has the sense of being full and needing nothing. It refers to the nth degree of virtue. So what **Jesus** is telling us is that by loving our enemies, we will grow in the complete love of **GOD**. Perfection is not about a measure of performance but rather, a state of mind or attitude.

The concept of this prefect love of **GOD** is reflected in other references as well:

Matthew 5:39-42 NLT: *But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.*

Romans 12:19-21 NLT: *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

2 Timothy 2:24-26 NLT: *A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.*

We can see by these examples how our being loving to our enemy will positively affect their attitude. This is not to say that all people will be won over in this manner but it is not our responsibility to win them over. It is our responsibility to treat them in the manner that our **Father** desire us to treat them and He will take care of the rest.

Another important aspect of our treatment for our enemy is to pray for them. Pray for our enemies would be considered an act of intercession. Intercession is defined as pleading the case for another. **Jesus** gives us an example of the heavenly intercession, who is before the throne of our Father pleading our case, Romans 8:34.

We can take another lesson regarding intercession from the prophet Ezekiel, who spoke of the failure of people to stand in the gap for others, Ezekiel 22:30 NLT:

I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one.

It is important to understand that **GOD** does not need us in order to intercede into a person's life for He is absolutely sovereign, but He desires for us to do so for our benefit. When we choose to partner with our **Father** on behalf of another person, we will then grow in the process. This was the case in the reference from Ezekiel. **GOD** desired people that would work with Him to build righteousness in the land and not one was to be found. **GOD** is seeking the same thing for us today. He is looking for people that with allow compassion in their hearts for the lost people around them and will take time from their life to intercede for these people. When we do obey **GOD** in this manner, we will activate a powerful move of **GOD** in these cases. We don't always get to see the outcome from such an adventure, but one day we will, and it will be exciting to see the affect our prayers had on the lives of others.

We have discussed the spiritual warfare that we conduct for others but now it is time that we explore the manner of warfare for ourselves. The main issue of personal warfare is to receive and maintain truth from the **Father**. The role of the **Holy Spirit** is to guide us into truth, as mentioned by Jesus in John 14:17. Truth is the basis for our salvation and our continued spiritual growth. We must understand the truth regarding who **GOD** is and the work of **Jesus**. The adversary of our soul will try to deceive us so that we cannot walk in the truth. The basis of this battle is found in the Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:3-9 NLT:

He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."

The first of the seeds (words of truth) fell on the footpath and the adversary was able to come and snatch these words away. Some people have not allowed **GOD** to soften the soil in their hearts so their hearts remained hardened. They hear the words of truth and think they are neat, but the seeds have no soft ground in which to take root. The adversary comes and says 'Did **GOD** really say?' and the people say 'No, I guess he didn't.' They then walk away from the truth and remain unchanged. Part of the battle therefore is to keep your heart soft to **GOD** by communing with Him. I like a Scripture in Hosea that addresses this point, Hosea 10:22 NLT:

I said, 'Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that He may come and shower righteousness upon you.'

The second batch of seeds (words of truth) fell on the shallow ground that had a rocky base. They were excited by the words and they had great zeal for **GOD**, but they did not take the time to build a solid foundation for their faith; when their zeal died, so went their faith. **Jesus** wants us to build a solid foundation with Bible study, prayer and other spiritual disciplines so that we can go the distance in our faith. **Jesus** related the need for this foundation in the following parable, Matthew 7:24-27 NLT:

"Anyone who listens to My teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears My teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

The third batch of seeds fell into the thorny areas and when the plants shot up, they were choked out by the thorns. The thorns represent the cares of this world. So many believers get caught up in the material aspects of our society and then get overwhelmed by the financial pressures. **Jesus** wants us to live within our means and to focus on spiritual matters rather than material possessions. There is nothing wrong with material things as long as we do not allow them to consume our time or affections. The Apostle Paul gave us this wise advice, Philippians 4:11 CJB:

Not that I am saying this to call attention to any need of mine; since, as far as I am concerned, I have learned to be content regardless of circumstances.

The rest of the seed fell on good ground where the truth was able to bring these believers to spiritual maturity. They were able to effectively assist in the harvest of souls, increasing their fruit many times over. Being fruitful is a battle because we face foes that desire us to be ineffective in our faith. Our foes consist of our adversary, Satan and his host of spiritual forces, our fleshly desires, our propensity towards pride, and even the unredeemed people that do not understand us. Thus the battle to be fruitful and to help others is a never-ending struggle, but **Jesus** has given us some very valuable armament in which to conduct this battle. This armor is detailed in Ephesians 6:13-18 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor (breastplate) of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

We shall examine each of the components of the armor separately:

- ☞ **Take up every piece of armor:** We need to be fully equipped for this battle. This means that we need to understand every aspect of our armor and we must be prepared to use it. Many believers will make a mental inventory of their armor in their morning prayers to make sure that they are ready for the day.
- ☞ **You will be able to resist:** We need to understand that the nature of corporate warfare is offensive in nature (bringing the Kingdom of GOD to the Earth), while the nature of personal warfare is primarily defensive in nature. The reason for this being that **GOD** has already equipped us with everything we need, Ephesians 1:3. Our problem is to learn about our blessings, to fully appropriate our blessings, and then to apply these blessings to our life. The task is made more difficult because we have an adversary that wants to keep us from walking in all of the blessings that **GOD** has blessed us with, thus the defensive nature of personal warfare.
- ☞ **Belt of truth:** Truth is the most essential component of the armor for as **Jesus** said, 'the truth will set you free,' John 8:32. We will discuss more about the importance of truth in the life of the believe in the following reference but for now it is sufficient to know that truth affects every part of our spiritual walk and our adversary will try to bring deception into your life to countermand the truth. You need to know the 'Truth' in order to be able to stand from the attacks

- ☞ **Breastplate of righteous:** Just as the high priest wore a special breastplate to sanctify his ministry. We must also wear a special breastplate that is composed of our righteous attitude and acts. The purpose of the spiritual life is not merely to accumulate knowledge but rather it is to walk in a righteous manner. To be righteous means to do right things. The motivation for doing right things comes from the heart; a heart that has been ‘circumcised by the finger of **GOD** in order to produce a desire to do ‘right’ things. We cover our hearts with this armor so that we will not allow unbelief into our hearts that may cause us to sin. We are to maintain pure hearts during our spiritual walk.
- ☞ **Shoes shod in peace:** The Kingdom as we learned is made of righteousness, peace, and joy. We need to maintain these elements in our walk so that others will be attracted to us. Inner peace is an elusive goal for many in the world. They are besought by pressures from every side. We can help them to see the truth when we walk in peace in spite of the circumstances that may be in our life. It is like Peter walking on the stormy sea. We can walk in peace through the direst of circumstances. The Apostle Paul and Silas sang songs of praise when they were in prison, thus demonstrating all three elements of righteousness, peace and joy.
- ☞ **The shield of faith:** The shield of faith is a very important part of our armor. One of the most potent weapons that the enemy will use against us, are the fiery arrows of doubt. This was the very weapon that the adversary used against Adam and Eve, when he said, ‘Did **GOD** say?’ It takes knowing **GOD** and experiencing Him, as we go through the trials of life, to build our faith. We need to raise our shield of faith whenever we sense an arrow of doubt is on its way. Jesus did this when tempted in the wilderness. Satan would tempt Him but Jesus would reply, ‘It is written.’ In other words He would say that it was not true. We can say ‘no’ to the doubts that the enemy tries to plant in our minds.
- ☞ **Sword of the Word:** The sword is the companion weapon to the shield of faith. It is important that when we block an arrow of doubt from the enemy that we immediately respond with a word of truth from the Bible. It is like a one – two punch. We block with the shield by saying ‘no, that is not true,’ and then we swing the sword and say, ‘the Bible says’ This is a powerful combination of weapons and the enemy cannot stand before it. We see that the adversary attacked **Jesus** three times and then he gave up. He will do the same for you if you are sincere in this form of battle.

In conclusion, we need to reemphasize the importance of truth and those people referred to as ‘evangelists’ (people that bring the truth). The Apostle Paul’s most relevant words regarding this subject are found in [2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NLT](#):

We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

The greatest attacks that we receive as believers come in the form of human wisdom, which are contrary to the ways of **GOD** and in false arguments, which attempt to deceive even the most mature of believers, Matthew 24:24. This type of warfare underscores the need to be informed regarding spiritual matters. It is not sufficient to merely hear spiritual words on a day of worship but rather we need to be immersed in the Word of **GOD** on a daily basis. **GOD** admonished His people to be constantly learning about His word, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NLT:

Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

It takes this level of dedication to combat the lies that the enemy spreads. Our adversary is clever to include some truth within the lie so as to give it the appearance of truth, but only those that thoroughly know the Word will be able to detect these lies. We need to take deceptive or lying thoughts captive and then submit it to the truth of **GOD's** word. It is not wrong to have contrary thoughts but it is wrong to dwell on them. We then need to be active to attack lies when we encounter them. Our calling in this passage is to be active and not passive when it comes to the casting down of arrogant arguments. We cannot allow the arrogance of godless people deter us from speaking the truth.

It is the job of the evangelist of the body of **Jesus** to spread the truth of **GOD's** word to the disciples of the body, as well as to humanity as a whole. Everybody needs to hear the truth, so that we can mature in our faith. **God** has therefore called all of us to be 'evangelists and to partake in this very valuable ministry.