

*The Highest Form
of Spiritual Warfare*



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Introduction:

Are you sitting down?

Good.

After years of carefully studying the scriptures, I have come to believe that most of what we Charismatics teach on the subject of spiritual warfare is unbiblical, theologically unsustainable, and frankly, does not work.

For those of you who are willing to go wherever the truths of the Bible lead you, I invite you to join with me in comparing what we teach concerning spiritual warfare with the scriptures. I think you will be initially surprised. Then your eyes will be opened. You'll understand why so oftentimes spiritual warfare seems to produce so few lasting results. You will discover how to engage in spiritual warfare in its highest possible form—the way Jesus Christ waged it. And finally, in applying what you learn, you'll be set free.

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Chapter One

The Great Spiritual War Begins

Satan fired the first salvo in the spiritual war between God and him by rebelling against the Lord. In the beginning, Satan's name was Lucifer¹, and he was a spiritual being of great beauty and authority in God's kingdom. Eventually, Lucifer's pride swelled to the point where he no longer felt that even his highly exalted spiritual position in Heaven was sufficient. He rebelled against God. As a result, he was cast down to earth. It is clear, Satan's downfall occurred because he disobeyed the Lord.

God had created Satan at the same time He created other angels. God had given him a place and role to fulfill in His kingdom. Satan had a choice, namely, obedience to God, or disobedience. Satan chose to disobey, which resulted in his fall. For the purposes of our study, I repeat for emphasis--Satan's catastrophic fall from Heaven was a result of his *disobedience*.

Another battle in the spiritual war between Satan and God took place in the Garden of Eden. God had created the planet Earth, and had placed man in the midst of a garden of plenty. The Lord gave mankind only one commandment:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16,17).

As with the previous skirmish between Satan and God, the choice was obedience or disobedience. Would Man obey God's command and enjoy blessings or disobey it, and suffer the consequences of disobedience? We know the story. Satan talked Adam into disobeying God. Note that Adam's fall, like Satan's fall, was the result of his *disobedience*.

Thousands of years later, Christ came to the earth. He perfectly obeyed the Heavenly Father by living a sinless life. His final act of obedience was to die on a cross:

. . . and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—Phil. 2:8.

¹ The word translated from Hebrew in the King James Version (and Latin Vulgate Version) as "Lucifer" (Isa. 14:12) means "shinning one." However, many translators have rendered it "morning star."

The Innocent suffered for the guilty.

Christ's final act of obediently dying on a cross redeemed mankind and defeated Satan and his kingdom:

For as by one man's disobedience [Adam's rebellion] many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [Christ's death on the Cross] shall many be made righteous.—Rom. 5:19

Therefore, the ultimate battle in the great Spiritual War was won by Christ's simple obedience in dying on the Cross. In this drama, the obedient one absolutely defeated the disobedient one. Therefore, we, without equivocation, can loudly claim: obedience defeated disobedience!

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Chapter Two

Christ's Method of Spiritual Warfare

The warfare Christ waged bears no resemblance to the spiritual warfare we attempt to wage today. In our current teachings on spiritual warfare, we exhort believers to attack the Devil, to "pull down strongholds," and to "bind" and "loose." I find it curious that Jesus Christ took absolutely none of these actions, and yet he won the greatest spiritual victory of all time. Could we be missing something here? I am certain of it.

For all of Christ's approximately three years of public ministry, and perhaps for his entire life, he was continuously engaged in spiritual warfare. Christ won the first battle of this war in his confrontation with Satan in the wilderness. Satan failed with Christ in the very area he had succeeded with Adam: the choice between obedience and disobedience. Three times Satan attempted to draw Christ off into disobedience to what God had commanded. Three times, Christ chose obedience over disobedience. Christ's steadfast clinging to obedience defeated the Devil in the wilderness. Every action of Christ's life was an action taken in obedience to God. Christ said, ". . . the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him."—John 8:29.

Consider again Christ's temptation in the wilderness. Ask yourself this: Why did Christ go into the wilderness in the first place? "Then was Jesus

led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.”—Matthew 4:1.

Jesus Christ went into the wilderness not to attack the Devil, bind the Devil, wrestle with the Devil, or to pull down spiritual strongholds. He went there in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Christ persisted in obedience to the commands of scripture regardless of the temptations of Satan, and in spite of the demands of his own physical body weakened by 40 days of fasting. By doing so, while persisting in absolute obedience, he completely defeated the Devil. What was the result of his obedience to scripture? “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.”—Luke 4:13. Christ’s obedience to God’s Word drove Satan off. There was no binding or loosing in the sense of Christ saying, “I bind you Satan” as we teach believers to do. There is no record of Christ wrestling in prayer or pulling down strongholds. Simple obedience defeated Satan.

Christ’s actions in the wilderness were the consistent approaches he took in dealing with the Devil. As far as this author can determine, Christ dealt with Satan, and warred against Satan, primarily by focusing on obeying God. His obedience consistently disarmed and frustrated Satan at every turn, ultimately destroying Satan’s power utterly at Calvary.

I have frequently heard fellow preachers teach that sometimes Jesus Christ “spent all night in prayer against Satan, wrestling in prayer against principalities and powers, and pulling down strongholds.” Please show me, even one single reference in scripture that supports this teaching. The scriptures give us no example of Christ praying against Satan. The only time we are told of Christ praying all night, we are told:

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

Christ prayed *to God*, not *against Satan*.

The Bible gives us only one example where the Lord Jesus Christ prayed a long prayer. He prayed the prayer at the end of the Last Supper. You can read it in its entirety in John Chapter 17. In this lengthy prayer, perhaps one of the most important in his life, Christ’s focus is again on God, and his prayer asks for many things. However, there is only one mention made of Satan. There is no binding of Satan, there is no loosing of anything, nor is there any pulling down strongholds. In John 17, the only time Christ mentions Satan or his kingdom is when he prays, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15, NIV).

We are given no indication that Christ ever focused on praying against Satan. Indeed, from what we read in the scriptures, Satan does not appear to be even a blip on Christ's radar. And why should Satan be? After all, Christ is the King of Glory, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful God manifested in the flesh. Satan is merely a fallen angel that had rebelled against God, and had fallen from Glory. Satan seemed to be no more than a nuisance to the Lord—with Christ giving Satan no more thought than he would give to a pesky fly that he shooed away from his face.

It is interesting to note also (as far as we know), Christ did not spend lengthy periods of time praying for a city, or praying about the meetings he was getting ready to hold before going into a city. After ministering in a city, if the people did not receive him, he did not pray for them afterwards. Nor did he tell his disciples to pray for them. When he preached in Nazareth, he did not "bind" the Devil, and he did not "pull down the strongholds" before entering the city to preach:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. . . . And he came to Nazareth. . . . And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath. And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way. And came down to Capernaum. . . ." (Luke 4:14,16,17,18,28-30, KJV).

Christ did not "bind" the Devil before entering Nazareth, and he did not blame the Devil once he left there. What were Christ's reactions to being rejected in Nazareth? He accepted the fact that they had rejected him and he moved on to Capernaum. As far as we know, he never returned to Nazareth to minister. Nor did he pray for the city or its people that we know of. I'm not saying that we should not pray for people who reject us or reject the Gospel we preach. I'm pointing out to you that many of the things we assume Christ did in ministry, and many things we practice and teach others to do, are not reflected in scripture.

Another similarly enlightening event took place in Gennesaret. The Scribes and Pharisees confronted Christ with some questions. Christ answered their questions and rebuked them for being hypocrites. Afterwards, Christ's disciples asked him about the exchange:

Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted,

shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matthew 15:12-14).

Notice what Christ did not tell his disciples in response. He did not say, as most of us Charismatics would respond today, “Now listen. The reason the Pharisees and Scribes of Gennesaret rejected me is because they are blinded by the Devil. I want you to pray and intercede against the spiritual principalities and powers over that city. I want you to take the spiritual authority I have given you and pull down those strongholds. I am assigning you the task of breaking the Devil’s power over Gennesaret. When you have prevailed in prayer, we will return and preach there, and revival will break out.” No, Christ said nothing like that. In addition, as far as we know, he never returned there either. He simply said, “Let them alone.”

How do we square Christ’s words and reaction to current day spiritual warfare teaching?

We can’t.

Therefore, either the Lord made a mistake, or we are mistaken in our assumptions concerning spiritual warfare. Since the Son of God is incapable of error, we are clearly misunderstanding something somewhere.

Not only did Christ not focus on Satan in prayer, he gave us no instruction to focus on him either. In the Lord’s Prayer (or Model Prayer), the Lord set forth an example of the kind of prayer we should pray, and in that prayer Satan is not even mentioned by name. (Matt. 6:9-13). Nothing is “bound” or “loosed.” The only time Satan or evil is even mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer is when Christ told us to pray that God would, “deliver us from evil,” or as some translations say “the evil one.”

A person might reasonably ask, “If Christ never attacked the Devil, then how do you explain the times in which he cast out evil spirits?” Christ went forth in ministry, obeying God, blessing and healing people. When demon possessed people showed up in his meetings or got in his path, he cast the demons out. He did not chase or track down demon-possessed people and cast out the offending spirits.

Jesus Christ was not focused on attacking Satan. He was focused instead on obeying God completely, knowing that his obedience to God would ultimately defeat Satan.

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Chapter Three

Warfare as Taught by the Goodwins

Allow me at this point to introduce something that the Goodwins taught. For those of you who are not familiar with the Goodwins, I am speaking of the Rev. and Mrs. J.R. Goodwin. The Holy Spirit used them mightily in spiritual gifts and in setting people free. Among other accomplishments, they taught Kenneth Hagin Sr. about spiritual gifts, and Brother Hagin patterned his prophetic ministry after the flow he saw in the Goodwins. The Goodwins were among the earliest teachers in the last century on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. I believe in giving credit where credit is due. I had never heard this teaching until I came across it in a recorded sermon of theirs entitled “Binding Satan.” You can listen to this recording on my website at:

<http://brothermel.com/bindingsatan.aspx>. Although their teaching on spiritual warfare ran counter to teachings I had heard before, and I initially disagreed with them, as I followed their reasoning, and searched the scriptures, their arguments persuaded me.

They introduced an entirely new concept of spiritual warfare to me. Brother and Sister Goodwin taught that no Christian can “bind” the Devil. (We will examine in detail what Christ said about binding and loosing shortly, but for the moment, follow their line of reasoning with me). The Goodwins rightly pointed out that the Bible says nothing about Satan being “bound” until the day the Angel of God “binds” him with a chain and casts him into the Bottomless Pit:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more . . . (Rev 20:1-3).

Think about it. If we could bind the Devil with our faith, why would any angel need to come and bind him later? We could all just join together right now, bind the Devil, and cast him into the Bottomless Pit ourselves. Slam-dunk, end of story. The plain fact of the matter though is the Bible says nothing about Satan being bound in any way, by you or me, until this Angel comes and binds him. Not once in the Gospels or the Book of Acts is Christ or the Apostles quoted as saying, “Satan, I bind you!” If our common teaching were true, that we can bind Satan, surely we would see Christ or the Apostles bind him rather frequently. However, as far as we can tell, they never “bound” Satan even once. Yet, we think we can.

The Goodwins taught that when you trust God and obey Him, your *obedience* binds the Devil. This teaching is consistent with what we have already seen from scripture. Namely, it was Christ's obedience that defeated the Devil as he lived his life on earth. Why wouldn't our obedience to God defeat the Devil in our lives in the same way that Christ's obedience to God defeated the Devil?

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Chapter Four

A Fresh Look at Binding and Loosing

We get our teaching about binding the Devil from a particular passage of scripture:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:13-19).

Because we usually examine verse nineteen from the King James Version, we commonly teach that Christ gave the Apostles, and us by extension, the ability to bind things and loose things on earth, and that when we do so, those very things will be bound in Heaven also. However, the original Greek says something quite different from the way the King James Version translates verse nineteen. This fact is reflected in other translations, such as the Amplified Version that reads:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven.

This more accurate translation paints a considerably different picture than what we teach, doesn't it? We teach that whenever you face a situation, you can bind the Devil, and loose the blessings of Heaven. However, this scripture makes it clear that we can bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on the earth ONLY what has *already* been bound in Heaven. In addition, we can loose (declare lawful) on the earth ONLY what is *already* loosed in Heaven. We have taken an imprecise translation of a single scripture, and have built an entire Spiritual Warfare Movement on it. We have whole ministries and conferences devoted to teaching believers how to "bind" the Devil and how to "loose" the blessings of God. This erroneous spiritual warfare teaching has grown exponentially in our circles over the last 20 or 30 years, and has been so widely taught, that no one even questions its validity anymore. Many people believe that since it has been taught among us for so long, it simply must be true, or it would have been exposed and refuted long before now. Well, I am exposing and refuting it now.

Allow me to share with you what I believe the Lord was emphasizing and teaching in this passage of Scripture.

Christ asked the disciples who men said that he was, and who they believed he was (Christ already knew the content of their hearts, just as he knows the content of every man's heart). Peter replied with the belief that was solid in his own heart: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Beginning at this point, Christ goes forward to explain the source and the result of Peter's statement. He told Peter that first, this was not just something Peter had thought up on his own. Peter had been with Christ for some period of time, heard his words, and seen the miracles worked by the Son of God. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Heavenly Father had driven home and made real to Peter's heart the fact that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. This much of the Gospel had been made real to Peter's heart or inner man, and Peter believed it.

At the same time, Christ explained to Peter the results of his belief in Christ. He said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona . . ." Peter's belief in Christ led to something beyond just a mental confidence, or even peace of mind. It actually placed a blessing on Peter that affected some things in the spiritual realm. Christ said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . ." He delegated a measure of spiritual authority to Peter, and to all who truly believe in Christ as Savior. However, he defines clearly the extent and limitations of that authority. It is great enough to reach into Heaven itself for answers to prayer from God. However, it is limited to God's will and to what He

has *already* bound or loosed in Heaven: "and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven."

What does this all mean? To me it means that Peter obeyed and accepted what the Holy Spirit had illuminated to him from the Scriptures. In a similar way, I believe that as we accept and obey what the Holy Spirit illuminates to us from the Scriptures, our obedience binds on the earth what God has already willed to be bound from Heaven, and our obedience looses on the earth what God has already willed to be loosed from Heaven. Our authority is mighty in prayer. This may have been what James meant when he wrote:

The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]. Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have [with feelings, affections, and a constitution like ours]; and he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, and no rain fell on the earth for three years and six months. And [then] he prayed again and the heavens supplied rain and the land produced its crops [as usual](James 5:16-18).

The earnest, heartfelt, continued prayer of a Believer in Jesus Christ makes tremendous power available. But our spiritual authority is also limited. Every time in the New Testament, when a believer's authority is mentioned, it is mentioned with a consistent limitation:

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:13).

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (II Cor. 2:14).

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:57).

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6).

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the

same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15:4-6).

For decades or centuries, the Church taught that believers had no spiritual authority whatever. This left believers powerless and defeated. The Word of Faith Movement came along, teaching and over-emphasizing spiritual authority to the point where we have made it sound like we can walk into any situation, and regardless of the condition of our walk with Christ, we can bind whatever the Devil is doing, and loose whatever we think God wants, and it will come to pass. Such is simply not true. Our authority is great, but limited. It can only be exercised in accordance with the will and purpose of God.

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Chapter Five

Spiritual Authority in Practice

Have you ever noticed what happens when a minister goes around the country supposedly “binding” the Devil over this city or over that state? Have you ever actually seen that work? I haven’t. I know of no instance in modern times in which a preacher, prophet, or apostle has bound the Devil over a city and made it work by simply declaring, “Satan I bind you!” An example of misguided attempts to exercise spiritual authority occurred back in the 1980’s with the ministry of a prominent Word of Faith minister of the day. He went to San Francisco and to other cities, leading massive prayer rallies in convention centers and in coliseums, in which he and local believers supposedly “bound” the Devil and loosed “the Spirit of Revival.” Do you know what happened? We have no statistical evidence that sin, evil, or crime decreased or that righteousness increased in any of these cities. Nor did the numbers at altar calls and on church membership rolls swell. And what happened to the minister who attempted this? His ministry collapsed in scandal, he had a nervous breakdown, he divorced his wife and his ministry to this day—20 years later—is just a shell of what it had been, and his name is rarely spoken anymore in our circles. He found that he could not “pull down strongholds” over cities. Nor could he “bind” or “loose” anything of his own initiative. It simply did not work.

Chapter Six

Biblical Examples of Spiritual Warfare

We are not left in the dark. We are not left clueless as to what genuine spiritual warfare is and is not. In Jerusalem and Ephesus, the Bible gives us examples of spiritual warfare being exercised and how it brought genuine revival to both cities. These examples bear no resemblance to what we attempt to do through spiritual warfare today.

Peter and John healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple in Jerusalem, and used the opportunity to preach Jesus Christ to the onlookers. They were arrested. The next day the two Apostles were called before the High Priest who demanded an explanation. Peter preached Christ to them. The authorities threatened them further, and let them go. Peter and John returned to the group of Christians and told them the story. Now read with me the prayer the Church prayed in united faith, and the outcome:

And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:23-33).

Did you notice that in his or her prayer, no one mentioned the Devil even once? No one “bound” or “loosed” anything by saying, “I bind this,” or, “I loose that.” They did not even pray for a Revival. They asked God to behold the

threats, to grant His servants boldness to “speak Thy word,” to give healings, signs, and wonders by the name of Jesus. In addition, God responded to their prayer with so much of His manifested power that the building they were in was *shaken*. They were filled afresh with the Holy Spirit, and “great power” and “great grace” came. This was all accomplished through one united prayer to God that did not even mention Satan, and through the powerful preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Tremendous victories came in response to this kind of spiritual warfare.

How do we square this account where no one proclaimed, “I bind this” or “I loose that” with our current teachings on spiritual warfare?

We can't.

A second example of the Early Church exercising their God-given spiritual authority, and the victorious result occurred in the City of Ephesus. Paul found approximately 12 men who had been baptized with John's baptism, which was a baptism of repentance. Paul ministered to them further, making sure to lead them into a full salvation experience in Christ. Let us pick up the story from there and examine the actions Paul took to bring a tremendous revival to that city:

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul . . . And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed (Acts 19:6-11, 18-20).

No doubt, Paul and the believers prayed in Ephesus. However, there is no mention of Paul and the Christians in Ephesus binding the Devil, loosing revival, or spending extensive amounts of time wrestling in prayer against spiritual principalities and powers, as we believe is necessary today. Their spiritual warfare consisted mostly or entirely of boldly preaching the Gospel. The result? Multitudes throughout the whole region heard the Gospel and many came to Christ, "special miracles" were worked by God through Paul, fear fell on sinners, and the name of Jesus was magnified. Additionally, numerous people who were involved in the occult converted to Christ, brought their books and burned them before all men. The Holy Spirit explains it this way: that the Word of God, the preaching of the Gospel, "mightily grew and prevailed."

A mighty revival spread throughout the whole region, not through someone saying "I bind Satan" or "I loose the Spirit of Revival." The revival came in response to the bold preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Chapter Seven

Wrestling With Principalities and Powers

There are two passages of scripture that are regularly taken out of context to justify attacking the Devil in various manners. Please examine with me these scriptures in context and see what they actually say and do not say. The first one involves a misrepresentation of what a spiritual "stronghold" is and is not. The Greek word translated "strongholds" appears only once in the New Testament. Paul uses it as a figure of speech as he is defending his ministry and Apostleship. Notice the context in which this is used:

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. 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. And we will be ready to punish

every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (II Cor 10:1-6, NIV).

In defending his ministry, and those of his associates, he makes it clear that his is not some sort of ministry based on carnal motives. He talks about how the world uses physical weapons, but he and his associated ministers use spiritual weapons that “demolish strongholds” by demolishing “arguments and every pretension . . . [and] take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” A stronghold is described in this scripture as an assortment of arguments, pretensions, and thoughts that people use to convince themselves that they have no need of Christ as Savior. We teach that the “strongholds” in this scripture refer to satanic strongholds in the spiritual realm--literally spiritual fortresses—that we must demolish with our faith by binding and loosing. However, it is clear from the context that Paul is speaking here not of spiritual structures that he pulled down with his faith, but arguments, pretensions, and thoughts in the minds of sinners that he demolished by preaching to them the Gospel, confronting their sins, and leading them to genuine faith in Christ.

There is no doubt that Satan has many situations, lives, countries, and even churches bound up. However, to claim, as we do, that these “bound up” areas are “strongholds” that we are authorized to attack with our faith, is simply not supported by this, the only scripture that mentions strongholds.

Another scripture that is misused to justify attacking the Devil is the description in Ephesians of our spiritual armor. Again, I ask you to note what it actually says, and does not say:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph 6:11-18).

First, please notice that there are *no offensive weapons* in our arsenal. We are given nothing with which to attack the Devil. If Satan truly dwells in spiritual “strongholds” or fortresses in the spiritual realm, how can we possibly tear one down by banging on it with our sword and shield? Nowhere are we told to wage spiritual war with the “battering ram of faith,” the “spear, crossbow, and the flaming arrows of doctrine,” or the “wrecking ball of the Spirit.” The weapons we are given, such as the helmet of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, etc., protect us from outward attacks. The shield of faith is sufficient to “quench” the flaming arrows Satan shoots at us. The sword of the Spirit is sufficient to enable us to fight off the attacks of the Devil against us. I reiterate—these are all defensive, not offensive weapons. Had God wanted us to attack the Devil, He would have given us adequate armaments with which to do so.

Rather than attacking the Devil, who supposedly lives in spiritual strongholds for which our weapons are inadequate, I believe spiritual warfare consists of something much different, and far more profound than we have realized to date.

Remember that Satan fell by disobedience. And Adam fell through disobedience. But Christ triumphed over all by “obedience unto death, even the death of the cross,” (Phil 2:9). We have already seen that the Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness, not to attack the Devil, but to withstand the temptations or attacks that came *from* the Devil. Christ waged not an offensive, but a defensive battle. He had purposed to obey God perfectly. Satan tried to draw Christ off into disobedience. Christ defeated him by wielding the sword of the Spirit—a part of our spiritual armor—defending himself against the attacks and temptations of the Devil by quoting Scripture and fully obeying it.

Could we have possibly had spiritual warfare backwards all these years?

We focus on attempting to attack the Devil. Could it be that we should follow Christ’s example by focusing on obeying God while using our spiritual armor to protect ourselves from Satan’s attacks and to drive him away from us?

Could it be that we wrestle “against principalities and powers” only in the sense that we use our defensive armor to resist them as they try to pull us off into disobedience and sin?

Please take a second look with me at various translations of Eph. 6:11. Notice that all of these translations speak of withstanding, or standing up against, the attacks and strategies of the Devil:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.—NIV.

Put on God's whole armor [the armor of a heavy-armed soldier which God supplies], that you may be able

successfully to stand up against [all] the strategies and the deceits of the devil.—AMP.

put on the whole armour of God, for your being able to stand against the wiles of the devil,—Young’s Literal Translation.

. . . well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way.—The Message Bible.

Every translation of Ephesians 6:11 that I can find speaks in terms of us using our spiritual armor to defend ourselves against attacks and strategies of the Devil. None of these translations of this scripture speak in terms of us attacking Satan with our spiritual weapons. A statement from the Apostle James is consistent with Eph. 6:11. James writes in James 4:7:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.(James 4:7).—KJV.

So be subject to God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him], and he will flee from you.—AMP Version.

James’ statement, like those of Paul, makes no mention of believers attacking or binding the Devil. Paul writes that we are to “stand against the Devil’s schemes.” James writes that we are to “Resist the Devil [stand firm against him] . . .” “Stand against” and “resist” both indicate defensive, not offensive warfare. Neither apostle says anything to us about using our own initiative and spiritual authority to launch an attack against the Devil.

How can we square James’ and Paul’s instruction to wage a defensive war against Satan with our teaching that we are to launch an offensive war against him? We can’t.

* * * * *

Chapter Eight

Paul’s Method of Spiritual Warfare

Our current spiritual warfare teachings collapse when you compare what we teach with what the Apostle Paul practiced. Think about it. He is the one who wrote about “wrestling” with principalities and powers. He is also the one who

wrote about pulling down strongholds, and identified for us our spiritual armor in the Book of Ephesians. Paul is the one who taught us about spiritual warfare through his writings. Isn't it curious that he did not "bind" and "loose" in the way that we claim we can do?

Take for example, Paul's own experience with persecution and Satanic opposition. Notice what Paul did, and did not, do:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.—II Cor. 12:7-10

As Paul went forward and preached the Gospel, persecution and difficulties arose against him, and he called the source of these difficulties a "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan." Scholars have differing views of what this "thorn" actually was. Although a mathematical kind of certainty is not obtainable in this opinion, based on the context, I believe the "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan" was an evil spirit. I believe Paul perceived that an evil spirit was causing these difficulties. As far as we can tell, Paul took no direct action against the evil spirit. Instead, he sought the Lord about the matter. The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you." Paul gloried in his infirmities. Although the persecution and affliction never totally ceased against Paul, evidently it decreased greatly. Paul preached the Gospel throughout most of the known world, wrote at least half of the books of the New Testament, and lived long enough to be referred to as "Paul the aged." (Philemon 1:9).

Paul waged spiritual warfare in an almost completely opposite manner than what we teach today, and yet he won the victory.

How do we square this incident with our current spiritual warfare teachings?

We can't.

Either Paul missed it, or we are missing it today in our teachings.

Let's examine how Paul's actions deviated from what we currently teach about spiritual warfare, and then I'll share with you what I believe happened in this incident.

First, please notice, that as far as we know, Paul took no action against that evil spirit at all. That really flies in the face of what we teach. Our current spiritual warfare teachings promote the idea that since Christ won the victory at Calvary; "God has already done all that He is ever going to do about the Devil until the return of Christ." We teach that it is now up to us to use the name of Jesus to bind the Devil and to "pull down strongholds." Evidently, Paul did not teach what we teach, because we do not see him take any direct action against the evil spirit that was opposing him. As far as I know, Paul did not try to "bind" the Devil. Instead, Paul "sought the Lord" not once, but three times about this spiritual opposition. Why seek the Lord if He has left all such battles entirely up to us?

Second, the Lord's response to Paul does not fit our teachings. He did not say, "Paul, I have done all I am going to do about the Devil. It is now up to you. You need to take the spiritual authority that I have given you, bind this Devil, doubt not in your heart, and believe the things you say are going to come to pass, and stand in faith until the victory comes." Interestingly, Christ said none of that. Nor did He even hint at it. The Lord had an entirely different response to Paul than what would fit in with our teachings: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Third, Paul filled his mouth with what we Charismatic and Word of Faith believers would classify as "a negative confession." He wrote, "I rather glory in my infirmities . . . I take pleasure in infirmities . . . for Christ's sake . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong." We would have given Paul a grade of "F" in positive confession.

Yet the spiritual warfare Paul engaged in brought him victory. Paul did the exact opposite of what we teach, and it worked.

Please allow me to share with you what I draw from this incident. We begin with the fact that the Holy Spirit gave Paul many deep insights into the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As he set about to preach these revelations, persecution and different supernaturally empowered obstacles, rose against him. Paul realized this was the work of an evil spirit, what he called "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan." This evil spirit worked against Paul, trying to get him to give up, and trying to kill him. Paul describes all of the challenges he faced, much of which was probably caused by the work of this evil spirit opposing him, in this way:

Five times I received from [the hands of] the Jews forty [lashes all] but one; Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I

have been aboard a ship wrecked at sea; a [whole] night and a day I have spent [adrift] on the deep; Many times on journeys, [exposed to] perils from rivers, perils from bandits, perils from [my own] nation, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the desert places, perils in the sea, perils from those posing as believers [but destitute of Christian knowledge and piety]; In toil and hardship, watching often [through sleepless nights], in hunger and thirst, frequently driven to fasting by want, in cold and exposure and lack of clothing.—II Cor. 11:24-27. (Amplified Version).

All of this was designed with this purpose--to destroy Paul. Knowing that much of this was the work of an evil spirit, Paul engaged in what we would call “spiritual warfare” against this spirit, not by praying *against Satan*, but by praying *to God* as we saw Jesus Christ do in his earthly life. Evidently, the first two times Paul sought the Lord about this difficulty, he received no answer from the Lord. So he sought the Lord a third time, and received an awesome and profound answer.

The Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 11:9a, KJV). What does this mean? I believe the Lord was saying this: “Paul, I have given you a deep insight into My Gospel. You have been faithful to obey Me by going forward and preaching this Gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Regardless of the obstacles, keep obeying Me. My grace is sufficient to see you through these difficult and painful times. In these situations where you can do nothing, I step in and show forth My Own strength.” Upon seeing this truth, that weakness is the ideal place in which God chooses to demonstrate His strength, Paul wrote,

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 11:9b, 10).

Paul caught sight of what the Lord was saying. It so thrilled Paul’s heart that he began to actually “take pleasure” in the difficulties, because in the midst of these difficulties, the awesome power of Christ would rest upon him. Paul continued to obey the Lord by preaching the Gospel in spite of the difficulties and ignoring the pain, ridicule, and hardships. Paul gloried in the fact that, even though this satanic opposition was beyond his ability to personally control, it was not beyond God’s ability. How did it all end? On a day and in an hour of God’s

choosing, the Lord removed that evil spirit from being able to attack Paul. In short, Paul defeated Satan in the same way Christ did it—by obedience to God.

One might ask, “Why did the Lord allow this evil spirit to oppose Paul at all?” I believe we can find the answer to that question in Paul’s own words, using the Amplified Version:

And to keep me from being puffed up and too much elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations, there was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted (II Cor. 12:7).

Twice, in the Amplified Bible’s version of verse nine, Paul mentions that the Lord allowed this for a season “to keep me from being puffed up and too much elated . . . [and] to keep me from being excessively exalted.”

In short, I believe Paul is saying that the Lord permitted this spiritual attack to continue for a season to keep Paul’s ego in check. Truthfully, it can be a very heady experience to receive from the Lord great revelations or great gifting. The Lord knows how easy it is for us to become prideful when He chooses to use us greatly. In Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, we know very well the temptations that come to gifted ministers. Some ministers that God begins to use greatly, before long become egomaniacs and eventually self-destruct in ministry.

Some argue that the Lord actually sent that spirit upon Paul or against him. I think that is quite a stretch. However, we know clearly, the Lord could have stopped that thorn in the flesh from operating against Paul if He had so chosen. I believe He chose *not* to remove it for a certain period of time as a reminder to Paul that he was just a man. I believe the Bible is clear that eventually Paul was able to minister these great revelations of the inner workings of the Gospel while keeping his ego under control. Although we know that Paul was eventually executed for his Christian stance, the fact that he lived to be known as “Paul the aged,” indicates to me, that apparently the Lord removed the spirit from being able to continually attack Paul. We also know that Paul was extended leniency, even while in prison in Rome. He continued his ministry even while in prison by writing “The Prison Epistles,” namely, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians. This liberty and leniency, which allowed Paul to continue his ministry largely unhindered, indicates to me the absence of opposition from the “thorn in the flesh.”

Although the book of Acts leaves the question of Paul’s release unanswered, there is strong evidence for believing that he was released at the end of two years. After his release, perhaps in the spring of A.D. 63, Paul went east and visited Ephesus, stationing Timothy there when he left for Macedonia (I Tim.

1:3). He left Titus to complete missionary work on Crete, and in writing to Titus, Paul mentions that he has plans to spend the winter at Nicopolis (Titus 1:5; 3:12). Some suggest that from Nicopolis Paul may have made the traditional visit to Spain, working there at the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in autumn of A.D. 64.² II Timothy makes it clear that Paul is again a prisoner in Rome, and is kept in close confinement (2 Tim. 1:16,17; 2:9). At his first appearing before the court he escaped immediate sentencing, but in writing to Timothy he has no hope of release (2 Tim 4:16-18; 6-8). He was executed in Rome in late 66 A.D. or early 67.³ In all of this turmoil, Paul was obedient to the Lord and the Lord stood with him.

In the example the scriptures gives us of Paul, we see the same methods of spiritual warfare that we see in the life of Christ--no known attempts to "bind" Satan or "loose" anything. I find no evidence of Paul attempting to attack imaginary spiritual fortresses. Instead of that, I find a continued focus on obedience to God. Christ obeyed "even unto death, the death of the cross." Paul's obedience in continuing to preach regardless of the opposition, led to continued fruitfulness over many years in ministry. Both experienced eventual victory over Satan through the highest form of spiritual warfare: obedience to God.

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Chapter Nine

Seated With Christ in Heavenly Places

I wish to bring to your attention another line of reasoning we Charismatics and Word of Faith believers use from scripture to justify attacking the Devil and attempting to wage an offensive war against him. I'll point out where our reasoning is correct, and where we falter:

We correctly note that Christ utterly defeated the demonic principalities and powers that oppose us. This is one element of the cross work. In the following Colossians passage Paul makes it clear that the cross spelled the ultimate doom of Satan and his evil host of fallen angels.⁴

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.—Col. 2:15 NIV.

² *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), s.v. "Paul," by D. Edmond Hiebert.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The MacArthur Study Bible*, John MacArthur, author and general ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Bibles, 1997), Col. 2:15.

As a result of this great victory at the cross, we correctly note that Christ is now seated at the right hand of God, above and in authority over, all demonic principalities and powers:

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,--Eph. 1:20-22.

Scriptures support our teaching that at the time we are born again, we are automatically seated with Christ in heavenly places. We cite the following passage as evidence for this doctrine.

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus--Eph. 2:6

After studying many Bible passages, we *properly conclude* that Christ has all authority. We *properly conclude* that Christ has defeated the demonic

principalities and powers. We *correctly understand* that, in a spiritual sense, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6, NIV).

We *are confident* that this means we (former unbelievers) have been raised up with Christ, that is, we have been positionally resurrected. Just as Christ's post-resurrection state was new, powerful, and unique, we Christians, in whom Christ dwells, have a new life, a new power, and a new position.

We *correctly believe* that in addition to this, God has also seated us with Christ in the heavenly places or realms. This means that believers are positioned spiritually in heaven where Christ is. Christians are no longer mere earthlings; our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Christ is the exalted Son of God, and Christians are exalted sons and daughters of God.

We *correctly point out* that God's actions toward us (previous unbelievers) are similar to what he did for Christ:

" . . . , when he [God] raised him [Christ] from the dead, and sat him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20b, KJV).

Some of the parallels between Christ and us today are:

- Whereas Christ died *physically* (Eph. 1:20), unbelievers are dead *spiritually* (Eph. 2:1-3).
- While Christ was brought back to life and raised *physically* (1:20), believers have been made alive and have been raised with Christ *spiritually* (2:5-6).
- Christ *is seated* in the heavenly realms physically (in his resurrected, ascended body), but believers *are seated* with Christ in the heavenly realms spiritually (2:6).
- The divine power that can make an unbeliever have life, be raised, and exalted with Christ, is the same power that presently operates in believers.⁵ (All the conclusions listed in this litany come directly from the Scriptures.) Unfortunately, we, at times, begin to overstate the powers given to us in Christ and thus get away from biblical truths.

Here is where we begin to go wrong. We improperly reason that since we are seated with Christ in heavenly places; and since he has defeated and has all authority over demonic principalities and powers, we too must have great authority over all principalities and powers. We reason further that

⁵ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, "New Testament" edition, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, Inc, 1983), pp. 623-24.

since Christ has given us his name to use in prayer, and since Christ is “seated,” thus indicating that his great work of establishing the New Covenant of which we are a part is finished, it must be up to us now to bind these principalities and powers. After all, the Bible says that Christ is expecting and waiting “until his enemies be made his footstool.” If we don’t launch a war against these demonic principalities and powers, and bring Christ’s enemies “under his feet” how will it ever happen?

Yes, the Bible does say that Christ is expecting (waiting) until his enemies are made his footstool. The author of Hebrews wrote:

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.—Heb. 10:12,13.

It seems reasonable to me to assume that Christ’s enemies include both unbelieving humans and evil spirits. The Lord tells us in his own words how the evil principalities and powers—Christ’s enemies—will be made his footstool:

And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.--Mark 12:35,36.

It is important for the reader to notice--Christ does not say that believers will make his enemies his footstool. Interestingly, Christ quotes from the Old Testament:

The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet”—Ps. 110:1 (NIV).

This passage quoted by Christ was written by David. The word LORD (all upper case) is a reference to Yahweh (technically YHWH). YHWH is often known in the New Testament as “God the Father.” Here David is saying: Yahweh is saying to my Lord (*Adonai*). David’s Lord was Christ (prior to his incarnation). Thus, under inspiration David wrote that the Father said to Christ . . . “I [will] make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

The scriptures clearly state that the Heavenly Father—not believers—will place the enemies of righteousness under the feet of the risen Christ. God is currently doing just by:

- Bringing upon the hearts of individual sinners the convicting power of the Holy Spirit as we preach the Gospel, turning the human enemies of Christ into the sons and daughters of God.
- Devastating the influence of Satan’s kingdom over entire nations as multitudes in those nations turn to Jesus Christ for salvation.
- Limiting and driving out evil spirits, and breaking demonic bondages, from the lives of believers as we persist in obeying God.
- Exercising His power and thwarting the schemes of the Enemy when evil shows up and believers declare, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I refuse to accept this!”

The only part we play in this grand plan is to preach remission of sins through the finished work of Christ at Calvary, and by practicing obedience to God ourselves. I find no place in Scripture where we are instructed that it is our Christian duty to “bind” and “loose” Satan as Christ’s substitute, or as the Heavenly Father’s substitute. The Apostle James summarizes the entirety of our role in spiritual warfare:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil,
And he will flee from you (James 4:7, NIV).

* * * * *

Chapter Ten

Warfare or Legalism?

I believe the Lord explains to us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican what legalism is:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.— Luke 18:9-14.

In this parable, the Pharisee went before God expecting to have favor in God's eyes because of following a list of do's and don'ts. He listed the reasons God should hear his prayer: he wasn't an extortioner, an adulterer, unjust, and he certainly wasn't a Publican (tax collector). Also, he reminded God that he fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed. Christ said this Pharisee "prayed thus with himself." In other words, he got nowhere with God. The Publican did just the opposite of the Pharisee. He came before God, claiming no right to be heard, presenting no work or action of his own, but simply asking for mercy. The result? Christ said, "this man went down to his house justified [forgiven in God's eyes]."

When we do something in order to earn God's blessings, or to deserve His grace, we are engaging in Legalism. It is very easy to cross the line from having faith in God, to attempting to keep a legalistic list of do's and don'ts to get Him to move in our behalf.

Is the kind of spiritual warfare I've described another form Legalism? Nearly any action can be Legalism if you perform it in a legalistic way. Even something as full of God's grace as the born-again experience can be handled in a legalistic manner. For instance, a person could accept Christ as Savior, and then say to God, "I have accepted Your Son as my Savior. Now, You owe me!" Or a person who is seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues could fall into Legalism by saying, "God! I have repented

and repented. Now I deserve the Holy Spirit's empowerment!" God owes no man anything, and our feeble works and deeds carry no weight with Him. Only the Son of God is worthy.

Approaching spiritual warfare in the manner I've described is just about as far from Legalism as you can get, if you do it in a right spirit. Specifically, if you obey God because you want to stay in His will and please Him, and you trust that the things you can not change, He will change as you trust and obey, this is obedience, not Legalism. After all, Christ never engaged in Legalism, and he said of his own walk in life, ". . . the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him."—John 8:29.

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Chapter Eleven

Specific Obedience

The Apostle John makes clear to us the simple commandments we are to keep in order to be in obedience to God:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.--I John 3:22,23.

We are to “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” This means that we place no confidence in our own worthiness, and we place all of our trust and faith in the name of Jesus Christ and in his completed work at Calvary that his name represents. We are saved by that name. We receive answers to prayer by using that name. We resist the Devil in that name. And we are to lay down our lives for that name. We have complete confidence in the name of Jesus, that his name will do in prayer what he himself would do if he were physically present with us. Second, we “love one another.” We love our neighbor as we love ourselves. All of the other instructions in the New Testament are outgrowths of having faith in the name of Jesus and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

A person might say, “Keeping those two commandments would be easy!” Hardly! Try avoiding all the spiritual gimmicks and religious traditions of our day, and having instead, simple faith in Jesus Christ. Try loving your enemies. Obeying these two commandments is a challenge. A wise man once expressed it this way, “I choose to walk in love while bitterness and selfishness run riot around me.”

In addition to general obedience to God in believing on the Name of Jesus, and loving your neighbor as yourself, you have to obey God concerning His *specific* plan for your life. If you are called to preach the Gospel, then you have to preach the Gospel and fulfill God’s plan for your life. If you are called to preach, but God’s timing hasn’t arrived yet, then you have to remain in secular work and wait on God. Whatever God has called you to be, a businessman, a professional person, a minister, a parent, an educator—you must obey God and fulfill His purpose. If not, then Satan has largely unencumbered access to your life, and no amount of “binding” him is going to make any difference.

The necessity of obeying God’s plan for your life is demonstrated vividly by a vision the Lord gave a friend of mine who has a prophetic calling.

The Lord caught him up to Heaven in a vision. Although I do not place spiritual experiences on a level with scripture, sometimes it helps us to examine a vision in which something is shown to us that demonstrates a biblical principle. The Lord Jesus took my friend in a vision to what the Lord called "The Map Room." Jesus told my friend that he had a "map" or a plan for every human being's life, and he kept them here in this room. The room had drawers built into the walls from ceiling to floor and as far as could be seen in every direction. The drawers were the height and width of about 4 inches, and perhaps 12 inches in depth—large enough to hold a single scroll. Each drawer had a human being's name on it. As he and the Lord were standing there, a believer "prayed through" and entered the room. The believer did not notice Jesus and my friend standing there.

The believer went directly to the drawer that had his name on it. He opened the drawer, took out the scroll that described the Lord's plan for his life. He read it, and shook his head "No," and put it back in the drawer. He opened several other drawers, reading the Lord's plan for other individuals. In a bit he found a plan the Lord had for someone else's life, read it, liked it, and left the room. My friend looked at the Lord and saw deep anger written all over his face. The Lord said, "That man just rejected My plan for his life." Seeing such anger on the Lord's face, my friend purposed in his heart to never follow any plan other than the one the Lord had for him.

My friends, obedience to the Lord is not optional. He is God. You are not. He is the Lord. You are the servant. Don't ever forget these things.

The good news about obedience is that when you fully obey God, you have every right to expect the provision of God for your needs:

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:--Isaiah 1:19.

You also can trust the Lord to be an enemy to your Enemy:

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.--Prov. 16:7.

But God also told Israel that if they disobeyed Him, He would treat them like He treats the world:

As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.--Deut. 8:20.

Disobedience is very costly. It opens every door to the Enemy.

Chapter Twelve

My Experience with Spiritual Warfare

Many believers testify that they “bound” or “loosed” something by confessing over and over “In the name of Jesus, I bind [this]” or “I loose [that].” And they sincerely believe that it worked. However, for every time that “binding” and “loosing” appeared to work, those same people will have to admit that there have been far more times in which they applied the same binding and loosing methods to other situations and clearly nothing happened. They have no explanation for these failures.

In my own walk with Christ, there have been a number of times over the years in which I have confessed repeatedly that “In the name of Jesus, I bind” this, or “I loose” that. I believe that most times I did this in faith, and I sometimes confessed such confessions for as long as several months at a stretch. However, I cannot think of a single time that victory came by me confessing “I bind” or “I loose.” I have experienced victory, but it came by waging what I believe to be Biblical spiritual warfare: I focused on trusting and obeying God, and over the course of time, God moved in my behalf, giving me the victory in different areas of life.

Allow me to relate to you two instances of victories that the Lord gave me over the years that I believe are examples of biblically correct applications of spiritual warfare. I reiterate that I do not place spiritual experiences or even natural experiences on an equal level with scripture. I share these only because they are consistent with what the Bible teaches about spiritual warfare, and victories have been the result.

At a place where I worked years ago, I was abruptly transferred into a very disagreeable job against my will. The transfer was more political than anything else. I considered filing a grievance or fighting it in some other way. However, I just felt in my heart an emphasis on the Amplified Version’s translation of Matthew 16:19:

. . . and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven . . .

I believed that the Lord was saying to me, “This transfer isn’t My will for you. So just do not get into agreement with it. Consider it ‘improper and unlawful.’ On the outside of you, do the work they have assigned to you. But on the inside, refuse to accept this transfer, and I will do the rest.”

My boss and everyone else told me that there was no way I would ever get out of that assignment and back into my previous one. They blamed the transfer

on “budget restrictions,” and claimed that my previous job had been eliminated and did not even exist anymore. However, I didn’t let it worry me. I know that God always has the final word. I followed what I believed the direction of the Lord was at the time. Namely, I didn’t complain about the job, and even though it was a very disagreeable assignment, I did it with excellence. I left the rest up to the Lord.

About three weeks later, a man that had been in a mid-level management position at the company for years abruptly resigned after finding a better job elsewhere. Boy was everyone shocked! No one expected that man to ever leave the company. When he left, the company decided to eliminate his position, and to use his salary to re-fund my previous position. They returned me to my former job, and hired someone else for the disagreeable one. God gave me this victory through a legitimate exercise of spiritual warfare. I “bound” nothing and I “loosed” nothing in the sense we currently use these terms. In my heart and inner being, I just refused to accept this transfer, considering it “unlawful,” in accordance with that scripture and God did the rest.

Don’t misunderstand me. I do not believe our walk with God is an entirely passive one. Nor do I believe it is wrong for us to stand up for ourselves in secular situations. There have been times in which I have filed a grievance, or took an action against something I did not want to happen, but in this instance, I believed the leading of the Lord was for me to handle it in the manner described.

I would like to share with you a second kind of spiritual warfare that I have experienced many times. I will just be going about my ordinary business, doing what is right, being diligent, and obeying the Lord, and suddenly an unexpected breakthrough will come in a particular way.

A good example occurred years ago concerning finances. I was working a secular job, and getting ahead a little bit financially. It seemed like I came into a better understanding of finances. I could sense this better understanding, even though I could not adequately describe it in words. Suddenly the Lord gave me a spiritual dream one night. In the dream, I saw an evil spirit standing a few feet in front of me. He was facing away from me at a 90-degree angle. I saw his profile and the left side of his face. In a few seconds, he turned and looked directly at me. As he did, I was surprised when I saw his face. The left side of his face looked like the normal face of a man. However, where his right eye should have been, there was just a big ball of fleshy scar tissue. The Holy Spirit said to me that this was a spirit of “partial blindness.” I rebuked the evil spirit in the name of Jesus, and I saw him leave my life.

The Lord made me to understand that this spirit had been operating in my finances for years, partially blinding me to financial principles I needed to understand, causing me to fail to see wise decisions I needed to make. I further understood that by trusting and obeying God, my obedience had increasingly limited this evil spirit’s ability to maneuver. Finally, now at the point of victory,

God had graciously allowed me to see this spirit, and understand his work, and participate in the final act of totally casting him out of my life and finances. My finances have steadily improved to this day as I have continued obeying the Lord and making wise financial decisions.

This type of pattern has repeated several times in my life. I obey God and trust Him as the Lord of my life to change the things I cannot change. After a season of simple obedience to the Lord's will, He will suddenly give me a vision or dream in which He shows me some area of my life or ministry that was bound up. Several times, but not always, there was actually an evil spirit at work. The spirit had been limited more and more by my obedience to God until now it had to leave completely and permanently as I rebuked it in the name of Jesus. Then a few weeks or months later, that area of my life would improve dramatically.

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Chapter Thirteen

How We Exercise Our Spiritual Authority

Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life—if you are a Christian—and he is Lord of my life. I do not know what is best for me. Neither do you know what is best for you. But Son of God does know what is best for us. Allow me to give you an example of the need for God to make the decisions for our lives. Imagine that a promotion at work becomes available. You use your spiritual authority to “loose” it, and the promotion is given to you. But then after you are in that position for six months, you yield to temptation and enter into adultery with a new coworker. You lose your marriage, your honor, and your family. That position had a hidden pitfall. I thank God that none of us have the ability to “bind” and “loose” things based on our own limited thinking. We would destroy ourselves with that kind of authority.

Since we do not have that kind of authority to “bind” and “loose” things of our own initiative, when that promotion comes available, we approach it in an entirely different way. We trust God and say, “Lord this looks like a good promotion. But You know what is best. You are He that opens, and no man shuts, and You shut, and no man opens. So I thank You Lord for opening this promotion to me if it is Your will. And if it is not Your will, I thank you for shutting this door for me.” Then we wait and trust Him. The promotion is given to someone else. Six months later, the person who got that promotion falls into adultery with a new coworker, and he loses his marriage, his honor, and his family. Then you and I realize, “My God! That could have been me.” And we praise God for His wisdom in shutting that door.

I have lost count of the times God has shut seemingly wonderful doors for me in ministry or in secular situations. Those opportunities looked so good at the time. Then a few months or years later, something very negative is revealed about that situation God had blocked me from entering, and I am thankful for His Lordship over my life. And usually, once God has closed a door for me, within a few months or a year or so, He will open another door that is so much better for me. “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.”—Prov. 10:22.

Nearly every breakthrough I have experienced in the last nearly 30 years of walking with God has involved me going in a direction I would never have thought on my own to go in, or doing something I had never considered doing. God developed the situation and brought it to me. I bound nothing. I loosed nothing. I simply obeyed.

A good example is what happened to me in the early 1980's. I was a member of a certain Charismatic church. I ended up being ordained through that ministry. I walked uprightly, but the pastor seemed to grow cold towards me. The door with that ministry closed. His ministry experienced seemingly supernatural growth and favor. His congregation grew from about 250 members to around 1000. He built and outgrew one church building, and then built a massive ministry complex. Everyone praised his wisdom and were awed by his "anointing." One minister criticized me by telling me that it was too bad that I was not "anointed" like this minister obviously was. I was tempted to resent the Lord over the matter. I even talked to Him about it and asked Him, "Why did you close that door?" He gave me no response.

About 10 years after I left that man's ministry, it all "hit the fan." This pastor was arrested. He had been under investigation for nearly a year, and it was revealed that addition to several illegal acts, he had partnered with drug dealers to launder drug money through his church. He was found guilty and sentenced to 14 years in prison. That pastor went down, and took several people with him. When this news reached me, I fell on my face before the Lord. I realized that had the door remained open for me with this ministry, I could have been one of those who were slowly seduced into criminal activity, and I could have gone down with him. To this day, I thank the Lord that I did not have the ability to "loose" that situation and open a door for myself with that man's ministry. None of us have the wisdom necessary to enable us to be trusted with the kind of spiritual authority to "bind" and "loose" according to our own limited knowledge.

God closed that door for me with that pastor in 1983. But a year later, the Lord opened a door for me by bringing Sister Goodwin into my life. True to what the Psalmist wrote, "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it," the door God opened for me with Sister Goodwin added great spiritual riches to my life, and there has been no hidden pitfall or sorrow with it.

Although the highest form of spiritual warfare consists of focusing on obeying God and not allowing the Devil to drag us off into disobedience, I do not mean to imply that our warfare is always passive. On the contrary, when pure evil shows up on our doorsteps, we need to rise up and absolutely rebuke it in the name of Jesus. When sickness, temptation, sin, or catastrophe, comes our way we have every right to exercise our spiritual authority—as I did with that disagreeable job transfer—by saying, "I *refuse* to agree with this. I *refuse* to accept this. I believe this to be 'unlawful' as stated in scripture. I rebuke this in the name of Jesus!" And I believe that as we persist in obeying God, and in rebuking the evil attack of Satan, the Lord will eventually give us the victory over the attack as we stay in an attitude of faith towards Him.

However, there are times in which something comes into our lives, and it may take awhile to determine whether this development is an attack or work of

the Devil, or whether it is from the Hand of God. In spiritual warfare, one size does not necessarily fit all situations.

A couple of years after I was transferred into the disagreeable job assignment, and had refused to agree with it in my spirit, and God had returned me to my original job assignment, another transfer came. This too was politically motivated. This too was blamed off on budgetary restrictions. This too was against my will. So even though the Lord had given me no direction to do so, I immediately said, “Lord, in the name of Jesus I refuse to agree to this!” But this time it did not work. And I am so thankful the Lord didn’t listen to me! The new job assignment was a blessing in disguise. It took me out of an assignment that had become very stressful. The workload in the new position was less than half of what I had been doing in the other position. This new position also gave me access to some easy voluntary overtime that increased my income by about 20%. After a few weeks in that new assignment I said, “Lord, I change my mind. I realize this move is of You and I accept it.” If God had given us the power to bind or loose whatever we think should be bound or loosed, I would have bound from coming to me a blessing that the Lord desired me to have.

In the final analysis, the Lord needs nothing from you and me except obedience to whatever He places before us, and concerning whatever He impresses on our hearts from the scriptures. As I obey Him, and you obey Him, He has all authority both in Heaven and in Earth to bring to pass the things we cannot bring to pass on our own. Jesus Christ needs us to simply focus on obeying Him, as He obeyed the Heavenly Father. He needs us to trust—have faith in—His Lordship over our lives. As we obey and trust Him, He will bring to pass the things we are believing Him for, in His own way and in His own timing. This is the true walk of faith.

Although the Lord has graciously extended to us a certain amount of spiritual authority, we help Him and further His Kingdom not one bit when we attempt to exercise our spiritual authority in various directions *we* think best, relying on our own thinking and our own estimation of matters, vainly trying to “bind” this and “loose” that. But as we humble ourselves before Him, seek His face, and walk in close fellowship with Him, then He allows us to participate in the joy of being a part of a victory He is bringing to pass in our lives.

Our obedience to God binds the Devil’s activity in our lives more and more. If there is an evil spirit at work in some part of our lives in which the Lord is giving us victory, God may choose to draw back the spiritual curtain for a moment. To vindicate His own name, He may allow us to see into the spiritual realm and see that our problem, our pain, our burden, was caused by some working of the Devil, not as some work of God. And with the Lord standing behind us—so to speak—He may allow us to say in His name, “Get thee behind me Satan!” And that spirit has to leave. Or when an evil spirit is not involved, the Lord may allow us to declare, “Mountain, be thou plucked up and be thou planted in the sea!” And we see that mountain, that obstacle, be removed from

our lives. But such visions of the heavenly realms take place only if the Lord wills it, and we can exercise our spiritual authority only as He directs us. Nothing is done on our terms. All is done in submission to Him, because as He told us, “separated from Me, you can do nothing.”

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In Summation:

- I believe we need to quit trying to bind the Devil with our words and instead bind him with our obedience to God, allowing the Lord then to bring us the victory in whatever manner and timing He sees fit.
- Rather than going into attack mode and attempting to wrestle with principalities and powers by trying to launch a frontal assault on them, I think we need to focus on obeying God, and use our spiritual armor to fight off the emissaries of the Devil as they try to wrestle us off into disobedience.
- As a ministry approach, I suggest that we quit trying to attack imaginary spiritual strongholds with spiritual weapons that are not designed to be used in that manner, and instead, boldly preach and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and allow the Word to transform people and their cities.
- I propose that we allow Christ’s example to sink deeply into our spirits and that we come to realize that obedience to God is the highest, and most effective form of spiritual warfare.

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About the Author

The ministry of author, pastor, and broadcaster, Rev. Mel C. Montgomery is the fulfillment of a prophecy given by Sister Goodwin.

She and her late husband, the Rev. J.R. Goodwin, were lifelong friends with Kenneth Hagin. They mentored John Osteen, Billye Brim, Elizabeth Pruitt-Sloan, Brother Mel, and other leaders. Brother Mel built his prophetic ministry on the truths he learned from the Goodwins.

Toward the end of her life, Sister Goodwin laid her hands on Mel, prayed for God to use him in spiritual gifts, and prophesied that Mel would have “an anointed ministry, like some of the men of old.” Eventually this prophecy began to come to pass as people from around the world entrusted him with rare early Pentecostal recordings by “the men of old,” such as: Howard Carter, F.F. Bosworth, David Du Plessis, and others. Mel is the Copyright Agent for all Goodwin books and recordings. He has made these audios and many others available, free of charge, on his website, www.brothermel.com.



Brother Mel has authored four e-books including, “The Highest Form of Spiritual Warfare,” and “To Fall or Not to Fall,”—an examination and defense of Falling in the Spirit—co-authored with Dr. Charles Goodwin. From 2007 through 2009, Mel’s website was accessed over 1.7 million times by people in more than 150 countries. His weekly podcast, “Voices of the Faith Giants,” in which he interviews major Christian leaders, is heard around the world.

Mel ministers in local churches, conventions, and in ministers meetings. He is the Vice-President for Helping Inspire Ministries—a ministry credentialing association and fellowship.

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